

# Preparation      הכנה

September 2010

Elul 5770 - Tishrei 5771

## **Kehillat Chovevei Tzion**

**Kehillat Chovevei Tzion**  
Route 25A at Nicolls Road  
P.O. Box 544  
East Setauket, NY 11733  
(631) 689-0257

Visit us on-line at  
[www.kct.org](http://www.kct.org)

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*A Kehillah for those  
wishing to participate  
in traditional religious  
services on Shabbat  
and Yom Tov  
... so much more!*

**Established 1994**



Preparing  
to  
Celebrate  
the  
High Holidays  
at  
Kehillat Chovevei Tzion

Celebrating, studying and growing together as a community of the committed, the extended member families of **Kehillat Chovevei Zion** will again come together this year, **to celebrate its sixteen year** in its *Setauket Beit Midrash* for the High Holiday period. The KCT Ritual Committee is delighted to provide you with this compendium for self-study, for family and individual use, in preparation for the upcoming holidays.

**In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall observe a rest day, a remembrance with shofar blasts, a holy convocation. Vayikra 23:24**

**Shanah Tovah Tikatevu!**

**... KCT: For Holidays, For Year-round**

ברוך

Dear Chaverim,

Welcome to **Kehillat Chovevei Zion** for the High Holiday season, 2010/5771. This information packet will help you prepare for this holiday period. Here you will find information about observance of the High holidays, and about the KCT schedule of holiday services.

KCT is now in its 16<sup>th</sup> year. From the beginning, we have been a group of Jews committed to praying together and learning together. We are not only a religious community, but a community of friends, gathering for religious observances and for life cycle events, both happy and sad.

We hope you will enjoy the holidays at KCT. But more than that, we hope you will continue to come join us often in shul - you will find a place for religious reflection, for connection to your Jewish heritage, and a community of your committed friends and neighbors.

Wishing you a sweet and wonderful 5771.

Shana Tova Umetukah

*Charlie*

For the member families

of *Kehillat Chovevei Zion*,

Elaine Ehrenberg	Bruce Engelberg
Seth Forman	Harvey Goldstein
Douglas Lee	Charles Mann
Jeffrey Margulies	Martin Vitberg

Herman Werner

**.K.**

**... Seating**

Everyone will have reserved seats for *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur*. Seats are normally reserved for husband and wife, and dependents and household members. Additional seats are available for other family members who live outside our local area, or for guests who likewise live outside our local area. **Full-time students are guests of KCT and will be seated by the ushers in unoccupied seats.** Seating request information and purchases of additional seats, should be received **no later than Monday, August 23, 2010.**

**The charge for all additional seats is \$54 each.** If you need additional seats for your family or guests coming from a distance, please use this same reservation form. You will receive individual tickets for all of your seating assignments, which must be brought with you to each service and shown to the guard at the entrance for security reasons. **Your understanding of, and compliance with, the long-standing policy that tickets are not shareable and are intended for use by the person whose name appears on them, are greatly appreciated.** By the time of arranging for seats, your family's financial commitments to the *Kehillah* will need to have been met. **.K.**

**... Honors**

Members of every family in the *Kehillah* will be offered honors at some point during services on *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur*, consistent with our *minhag*, our traditions. Please be sure to send in the English and Hebrew names of your family members (printed, script or transliterated, as you prefer) so that those being honored with *aliyot* can be called up appropriately. **.K.**

#### .... Tashlich

As has been KCT's custom each year, we will once again gather at the **Setauket Duck Pond** on **Thursday, September 8**, at **5:30 PM** for the personal and meaningful brief Tashlich service. Following a verse from the Book of Micah, the community gathers at a flowing body of water and recites the prayers symbolically casting our sins into the moving waters, often in the physical form of bread crumbs, as the moving waters take them out to sea. Some opinions require the waters to be home to fish, reminding us of our precarious existence on earth, and that like the fish, we too are caught up by a net, the net of divine judgement. If one can not perform Tashlich on Rosh HaShanah, one may do so any time prior to Yom Kippur. **.K.**

#### .... Lulavim and Etrogim



Planning for *Sukkot* includes the purchase of a set of *lulavim* and *etrogim*. Some people make a delightful family expedition of this process, seeking out vendors in the City or elsewhere on Long Island; (see the accompanying article elsewhere in this booklet). Others prefer to arrange for their order to be placed through KCT. Orders paid by check in the amount of \$55 to KCT may be placed, if received no later than **Thursday, September 16**, using the enclosed form. **.K.**

#### .... Tzedakah and Yizkor

The essence of *Yizkor* is an act of *tzedakah*, a contribution made on behalf of loved ones, of which the *Kodosh Baruchu* takes note, to earn merit for the deceased in His eyes. Our *Kehillah* has made a significant, commitment to *tzedakah* over the years. **We consider it appropriate and necessary that a substantial part of our operating budget goes for various contributions throughout the year made by the *Kehillah* in the name of the collective member families.** We encourage you, as you plan your individual *tzedakot*, for whatever contributions are within your means and family custom, to consider Kehillat Chovevei Tzion as a worthy beneficiary of your generosity and support. **.K.**

#### .... Food Makes the Holiday

With no scarcity of recipes and cooking suggestions coming into all Jewish holidays, most of the *Kehillah's* participants renew fond culinary memories each year throughout the holiday period. But the fragrance and the special tastes will most assuredly be enhanced if you know that you have provided for those in the surrounding community who perhaps eat less lavishly or often not at all. The *Kehillah* has been a longtime supporter of several food pantries in the Brookhaven area, and while donations of non-perishable foods may be made at various times, we have set aside *Kol Nidre* evening as the point of special urgency for strong support of this *gemillut chesed*, and we ask when you come to services that evening, that you bring two or more such items with you, to deposit in the specially marked boxes in the entrance way. Should you wish to make a financial donation by mail, you may also find **Mazon** to be a respected and appropriate organization with such an outreach mission. **.K.**



#### .... KCT Partners with M'Yad L'Yad



**M'Yad L'Yad**  
*Helping Hands*

**M'Yad L'Yad (Helping Hands)** is committed to enhancing the lives of the Jewish needy in our own Long Island community. Volunteer sponsors paired anonymously with recipients encourages ongoing relationships and provides friendship and dignity, as well as material support. Visit [www.myadlyad.org](http://www.myadlyad.org) or call Amy Engelberg at 471-8414. **.K.**

#### .... Kehillah College Ties

If you have a son or daughter about to go off to college or graduate school, either as a freshman or as a returning student, we wish you a *Mazal Tov!*

and suggest that you be sure to register them in the KCT College Outreach Program, They will receive periodic mailings and "holiday gift packages" from KCT and remain in touch through e-mail. The cost is \$36 and is further subsidized by the *Kehillah* and a form appears in this packet for signing them up. **.K.**

### .... Melodious Prayer Elevates the Holiday

Leading us this year at the *amud* as our holiday *chazzanim*, will be **Bruce Engelberg** and **Ben Zion Levy**, whose talents and beautiful voices inspire us at Shabbat and Yom Tov services throughout the year. We are delighted to welcome **Harvey Goldstein** as the Ba'al Shofar this year, and we invite all those wishing to participate in leading any portions of the service to contact us at this time at 689-0257. **.K.**

### .... The KCT Memorial Wall

In the KCT Beit Midrash, the Memorial Wall represents the *Kehillah's* commemoration of our loved ones. Each plaque contains the name of person recalled, in Hebrew and English, and the date of death. *Yahrzeit* lamps on each side of the plaque are lit during the week of the appropriate date and for *Yizkor*. New additions to the Memorial Wall are specially dedicated at the next *Yizkor* service following placement, and each is individually remembered at every *Yizkor* service that follows.

### .... KCT Remembers

Throughout this past year, 5770, the *Kehillah* has continued to remember its extended family at all of its services, through the inclusion of names in its Memorial Book. Their names, alongside all those departed members of the House of Israel, who sacrificed their lives for **קדוש השם**, the sanctification of God's holy name, are enshrined in our souls and appear here as a lasting tribute to their memories, as we mindfully approach the start of another year with the promise of Life, Peace

and Goodness for all humanity.

*Kehillat Chovevei Tzion*  
Prime Minister Yitzchak Rabin

*Ellen and Richard Baron and Family*

Michael Baron  
Eleanor Baron  
David Schuster  
Jean Schuster  
Jack Feinstein  
Jules Gordon  
Sheldon Altman

*Lawrence and Susan Birn*

Walter Birn  
Mary Birn  
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Neil Silverman  
Bessie Silverman

*Fran and Stan Bogaty*

Ethel Galonsky  
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*Ira and Rona Dressler*

Philip and Eva Dressler  
Hana and Louis Piotrkowski  
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Shulem Dambrot  
Esther Dambrot  
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Edouard Dambrot  
Mirai Dambrot  
Hillel Rosner  
Lucien Dambrot

*Alan Ellman and Sons*

Wendy Ellman  
Jack Ellman  
Ronald Ellman

A memorial plaque order form is enclosed. Please call with any questions, as the plaques are cast bronze and permanent, making accuracy especially important at the time of ordering. **.K.**

### .... The Kehillah Remembers

The *Kehillah* remembers with great fondness and respect all the loved ones whom we have individually lost over the years. KCT produces a **Book of Remembrance** to be used at the four *Yizkor* services throughout the year. All names of family members who are so remembered are placed into the book by the *Kehillah*. There is no charge for any listings in this *Yizkor* book, and we invite you to take home a copy after services.

On these pages, you will find a listing of the included names from previous years. These will continue to be included automatically in future years. Should there be any changes to the listing, you need only send in those changes, to be received **no later than Monday, August 23**. *Yizkor* is at once both a collective experience and an individual one, and is the timeless prayer of personal memory of the Jewish people. *Yizkor* is recited twice during the High Holiday season, on Yom Kippur (Saturday, September 18) and on Shmini Atzeret (Thursday, September 30). **.K.**

### .... May the Memory of the Righteous Forever be for a Blessing

Judith Norbitz Stanley Norbitz Anna and William Walitsky Zina and Nachum Norbitz Regina and Usher Turkel	Hyman Gordon Elka Salant Harry Salant Ruth Levine Dorothy Mintz Lena Horowitz	Sarah Gottlieb  <i>The Friends of Fran Jarecki</i> Fran Jarecki
<i>Amy, Bruce, Pamela and Rachel Engelberg</i> Paul Engelberg Sylvia Engelberg Lawrence S. Foss Rae Danish Robert Danish	<i>The Hanish Family</i> Leah Abrahams Al Abrahams Rachel Shulkin Leon Hanish	<i>Harvey and Mady Kolker and Family</i> Ernest L. Hall Ruth Hall Morris Kolker
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<i>Lori, Jeff and Steven Forst</i> Abraham David Perlmutter Helen Perlmutter	<i>Stanley Harris</i> Janet Harris Sally Harris Minnie Levine Ethel Weinstein Ida Rhoda Lapp Irving Harris Jacob W. Harris Mark I. Gross Paula Harris Harry Weinstein Rebecca Lewinson	<i>The Lee Family and Charlotte Berke</i> Henry Berke Celia and Henry Katz Rebecca and Barney Berke Herman and Beatrice Berkeley Harvey and Dorothy Lee Sidney Berkeley Irving and Paulette Berkeley Joseph Berke Richard Lee Joseph and Esther Berkeley Melvin and Mildred Madison Ethel Mark Pauline Hurwitz
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<i>The Friends of Claire Gordon</i> Claire Gordon Julius (Jay) Gordon Louis Leventhal Dora Leventhal		

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Morton Zager  
Helen and Jack Zager  
Minnie and Harry Meissel  
Rose and Harry Tillem  
Ida and Sam Salzman

## **Zichrono L'Vracha**

**May their memories be for  
a blessing and for good.**

Names of loved ones to be memorialized with new plaques on the KCT Memorial Wall will be included in this year's Memorial Book if the plaque order form is received by the August 23 date, as well. **.K.**

**Remember your loved ones  
through the dedication of a  
plaque on the Memorial  
Panels of KCT**

## ... Preparation through Study and Action

*Drawn from various sources, ancient, historic and modern, the following selection of personal study materials is presented by the editors of KCT Preparations with a view toward stimulating thought, study, discussion, agreement and disagreement, and evaluation approaching and leading into the days of our holiday preparations in a variety of different ways. We start with an overview of the meanings and association with the unique sounds of the shofar.*

## ... The Shofar: What Do We Hear?

*Written by Rabbi Avie Gold, this overview presents material from the ArtScroll/Mesorah text "Rosh Hashana - Significance, Laws and Prayers.*

"Why do we blow [the shofar] on Rosh Hashanah?" the Talmud asks. In answer, the Talmud exclaims indignantly, "Why do we blow? - the Torah has told us to blow!"

What better reason, what further rationale do we need? The Torah clearly states (Numbers 29:1): "In the seventh month, on [day] one of the month, a day of [shofar] blowing shall it be unto you." Indeed, according to Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk, the primary intent upon which one should concentrate during the sounding of the shofar is to fulfill the will of the Creator.

That Israel needs no rationale other than "the Torah has told us to blow," is illustrated with a story told about the renowned chassidic Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev:

One year Rabbi Levi Yitzchak spent a long time in search of a man who would be worthy of blowing the shofar in his synagogue. Rosh Hashanah was fast approaching, and though many righteous folk sought the privilege, vying with each other in demonstrating their expertise in the mystical kabbalistic secrets associated with the shofar, none of them were to his taste.

One day a new applicant came along, and Rabbi Levi Yitzchak asked him on what deep mysteries he meditated while he was performing the awesome mitzvah.

"Rabbi," said the newcomer, "I'm only a simple Jew. I don't understand too much about the hidden things

of the Torah. But I have four daughters of marriageable age, and when I blow the shofar, this is what I have in mind: 'Master of the universe! Right now I am carrying out Your will. I'm doing Your mitzvah and blowing the shofar. Now supposing You, too, do what I want, and help me marry off my daughters.'"

"My friend," said Rabbi Levi Yitzchak, "you will blow the shofar in my synagogue!"

## TEN SYMBOLISMS

Rabbi Saadiah Gaon (10th century) enumerates 10 symbolic meanings alluded to by the mitzvah of the Shofar:

1. Rosh Hashanah marks the anniversary of the world's creation. As such it is also the day on which God's sovereignty over Creation began. Since it is customary to sound the trumpets at the coronation of a new king, we likewise proclaim His sovereignty over us on this day with the sounding of the shofar. This is in accord with the verse (Psalms 98:6): "With trumpets and shofar sound call out before the King, God."
2. Rosh Hashanah initiates the Ten Days of Repentance. Just as a king will proclaim a period during which amends can be made before a decree is to be enforced, so does the shofar blast proclaim, "Whosoever wishes to repent -- let him repent now. If not, let him not complain later."
3. At Mount Sinai the Jews shouted, "We will do and we will listen" (Exodus 24:7), when they accepted the Torah. At that time, the sound of the shofar continually increased and was very great (Exodus 19:19). On Rosh Hashanah the shofar reminds us to renew our commitment to "do" and to "listen."
4. The shofar reminds us of the admonitions of the prophets and their calls to repentance, as stated in Ezekiel 33:2-9... "He sees the sword coming upon the land, he blows the shofar and warns the people... [If] he heard the sound of the shofar but did not heed the warning; his blood shall be upon himself..."
5. The shofar reminds us to pray for the rebuilding of the destroyed Holy Temple, of which the prophet (Jeremiah 4:19-20) lamented: "I shall not be silent, for the sound of the shofar have you heard, O my soul, the shout of war. Destruction upon destruction has been proclaimed..."

6. The shofar, a ram's horn reminds us of the Binding of Isaac (Genesis 22), when Abraham sacrificed a ram in lieu of his son. We similarly offer to sacrifice our lives in sanctification of the Holy Name. Thus, may our remembrances ascend before Him for the good. (According to one opinion in Pesikta Rabbasi 40:6, the Binding of Isaac took place on Rosh Hashanah.)

7. The sound of the shofar inspires fear and trembling in the hearts of all who hear it, as the prophet (Amos 3:6) asks: "Can a shofar be blown in a city, and the people not tremble?"

8. The shofar reminds us of the great and awesome Judgment Day of the future, which Zephaniah (1:14-16) describes: "Near is the great day of God... a day of wrath is that day; a day of trouble and oppressiveness; a day of utter desolation; a day of darkness and blackness; a day of clouds and thick fog; a day of shofar and shouting..."

9. The shofar reminds us of the long anticipated day of the ingathering of the exiles, and arouses an inner yearning in our hearts for that time. "And it will be on that day, He will blow on a great shofar, and they will come -- those who were lost in the land of Assyria, and those cast out in the land of Egypt -- and they will bow to God on the holy mountain, in Jerusalem." (Isaiah 27:13)

10. The shofar reminds us of the resurrection of the dead and awakens our belief and yearning for that day. For then: "All inhabitants of the world and dwellers of the earth, when he raises a banner upon the mountains, you shall see, and when he blows the shofar, you shall hear." (Isaiah 18:3)

~

The Lubavitcher Rebbe writes about a number of additional beautiful insights into the Shofar, including: (a) its sound is compared to that of a child crying out to his/her parent (and, in turn, to our crying out to God, our Father); (b) the use of an animal's horn reminds us that even our most hardened "animal-like" instincts are included in the service of God; (c) although many ritual vessels can become "tameh" (ritually impure), the Shofar cannot -- the Shofar is the device with which we express our innate connection with God; this connection can be neither severed or sullied; it remains intact and is always ready to be drawn upon; (d) the Shofar preferably has a bend in it, symbolizing our

willingness to bend our will to that of God; and (e) the mitzvah of the Shofar is only fulfilled when it is blown with the intent of connecting to Godliness; the same is true of all *mitzvot* -- they are not simply tasks to be blindly carried out, but rather are spiritual tools to connect with God in a meaningful way. . . . **.K.**

## ... Selichot

*This overview of the Selichot prayers, traditions and practices, excerpted from the writings of Rabbi Yaakov Haber.*

What are Selichot?

Selichot are special prayers for forgiveness.

When are they said? They are usually said on fast days, which are occasions when the Jewish People needs special forgiveness for sin. They are also said during the period preceding Yom Kippur, which is obviously also such an occasion. In the Sephardic tradition, Selichot are said beginning with the month of Elul, through Yom Kippur. In the Ashkenazic tradition, they are begun at a time such that there will be ten opportunities for their recitation before and including Yom Kippur. This is based on the custom, once prevalent, that Jews would fast for ten days (eating at night, of course) before and including Yom Kippur. During the period from and including Rosh HaShanah, through Yom Kippur, there are four occasions when fasting is inappropriate (the two days of Rosh HaShanah, the Shabbat between Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, and the eve of Yom Kippur).

In general, the proper time of day on which to recite the Selichot is the end of the night, just before the morning, since this time is considered, in terms of Jewish Mysticism, a specially favorable time, in terms of the "presence" and "closeness" of G-d.

It is customary to say Selichot the first night before going to sleep, and, since the first part of the night is considered a time of din (judgment), the Selichot are usually not recited on the first night until after *chatzot* (relative midnight). In the Ashkenazic tradition, Selichot always begins on Motzei Shabbat, and in many congregations the first prayer begins "At the end of the Day of Rest, we approached You first."

There are three Hebrew synonyms: *Selichah*, *Mechilah*, and *Kapparah* all related to the idea of "forgiveness." What does each mean?

## ... Psalm 27: The Echo of Oneness

*Selichah*, usually translated as "forgiveness" is the first step which must be taken if someone has committed a sin, whether it be against G-d or against Man. To ask for forgiveness is to say to the "injured" party, "I am sorry for what I did; I sincerely regret having done it, and I will never do it again." The appropriate response to this request is to believe that the petitioner is sincere and "open the door" for him or her to "come in." A person who refuses to do this is considered a cruel person.

*Mechilah*, usually translated as "wiping away" is the response to the request "Can we put our relationship back on the level which it was on before I sinned against you?" A positive response to this is difficult, but within the G-dly powers given the human being, and is required.

*Kapparah* is usually translated as "atonement," as in Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. This is the response to the person who says, "My conscience will not let me live with myself, because of what I did to you and to our relationship." To respond positively to this is beyond human capacity. It is only G-d Who can reach inside a person and say "Be comforted." *Kapparah* is the climax of this three-part process, and is accomplished on Yom Kippurim.

The principal ingredient of all the Selichot Prayers is the "List" of the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy of God, "Hashem, Hashem, G-d, Compassionate and Gracious, Slow to Anger, and Abundant in Kindness and Truth, Preserver of Kindness for thousands of generations, Forgiver of iniquity, willful sin and error, and Who cleanses"

This passage appears in the Torah (Exodus 34:6-7) at the time that God proclaimed His readiness to do away with the Jewish People after the sin of the Golden Calf. According to R' Yochanan's interpretation (*Rosh HaShanah 17b*), Moshe felt that the sin of the Jewish People was so grievous that there was no possibility of his intercession on their behalf.

Thereupon, one Midrash relates that Hashem appeared to him in the form of a chazzan wrapped in a tallit, and taught him the Thirteen Attributes, saying, "Whenever Israel sins, let them recite this in its proper order and I will forgive them."

Thus, this appeal to God's mercy reassures us both that repentance is always possible, and that God always awaits our return to Him. The implication is also plain that if we emulate God's merciful ways, He will treat us mercifully in return. **.K.**

*Throughout the month of Elul, Psalm 27 is added to the daily liturgy to prepare us for the High Holidays. Rabbi Benjamin Segal, a past-President of Melitz, the Center for Zionist Jewish Education, and of the Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies, both in Jerusalem, has written a series of contemporary explanations of the psalms. Rabbi Segal's modern interpretation of this psalm evokes the many nuances of our relationship with God, all of which come to the light during the High Holidays.*

Elul is the month of preparation and shofar blowing. The name of the month has been understood to be an acronym for the Hebrew verse from the Song of Songs: אני לדודי ודודי לי - *I am my Beloved's and my Beloved is mine*. During Elul we read Psalm 27, twice daily. This practice is relatively new, evidently some 200 years old. But it is a wise practice, perhaps even essential.

The first half of the psalm speaks of assurance. The psalmist while describing the enemy from a distance (from whom will I be afraid), approaching (as evil men come near), preparing (should an army besiege me), and attacking (should war come against me), nevertheless is calm, above all danger, sacrificing and thanking God. The opening structure reflects both the growing threat and its total disappearance. The central word of the psalm is One. Facing all these threats, the psalmist feels the peace of unity, and throughout this first half the reader senses no doubt, no real threat.

How strange it is that the second half of the psalm depicts a world so totally opposite. Here we find a desperate search, a constant request, a pleading before the Holy One ("do not hide Your face ... do not thrust [me] aside ... do not forsake me, do not abandon me").

The author is abandoned by parents and surrounded by enemies. At the apex of this section, the psalmist cries out in agony, with a sentence he cannot finish, for it depicts the worst of all: Had I not the assurance that I would enjoy the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living .... His faith is his sole remaining thread connecting him to the land of the living. If he did not have this faith, then ... (unfinished)

Throughout the second half of this psalm, the reader hears the echo of the central term: One. The psalmist cries out, demands, asks and pleads that

his two worlds are one. I, the sufferer, depressed to the ultimate limits, am that same I who trusts, who is safe, who sits in the presence of the Lord.

For us, this is ideal preparation. Before we can approach repentance or the joy of the High Holidays, we must honestly confront again our own faith and belief. Ever since our father Abraham, we have anticipated the rewards of God's protection, but too often we have seen our trials and tribulations as challenges to our faith. The psalmist testifies once again that love of the Holy One is achieved, not by closing one's eyes, but, even as with less significant loves, through effort, honesty, and open confrontation.

The psalm demands oneness, reflecting an integration of most difficult circumstances together with security. The psalmist is a model, a puzzle, and even a challenge to us, for he did not hide from life's troubles on one hand, and yet lives within a framework of faith on the other. Reciting this psalm demands that twice a day we struggle with ourselves and our faith, in expectation that we will arrive at the Days of Awe ready for repentance, ready to celebrate on the holiday with a full heart before God.

In Elul, we renew our faith through search, as is also reflected in a modern *midrash* on this psalm, "*One have I demanded of the Lord, that I shall seek: I seek only that forever I will demand the one, demand the oneness, demand the unity, from the Lord.*" **.K.**

#### **... Tradition Today: Emulating the Angels**

*Written by Rabbi Reuven Hammer, the head of the Rabbinical Court of the Masorti Movement and the author of several books, the most recent being "Entering Torah", this essay appeared in the September 26, 2009 issue of the Jerusalem Post.*

Yom Kippur is the most solemn day of the Jewish year and it is also the strangest day, because it seems to negate all that makes us human. For this one day we step out of ourselves and become something else, something other. We are no longer part of this world as we know it. Denying our bodies food, drink, sex and any possible physical pleasure, we act as if the normal impulses that make us human no longer exist. It is almost as if we have slipped out of life into immortality.

Perhaps that is what the sages were trying to tell us when they created the legend explaining why Yom

Kippur is the only time when we recite aloud the line "Blessed is the name of His honorable majesty forever and ever" - *baruch shem k'vod malchuto l'olam va'ed* - in the recitation of the Shema. Usually it is said in a whisper. That line calls for an explanation because it is a rabbinic addition and not part of the biblical text of the Shema.

The legend is that when Moses went up to heaven to receive the Tablets of the Covenant, he overheard the angels praising God with those words. When he returned to earth he instructed the Israelites concerning all the commandments he had received and he also taught them that sentence of praise. But he said to them, "All the mitzvot I have given you I received openly from the Torah, but this verse is something that I overheard the angels say when they praise the Holy One. I stole it from them, therefore say it in a whisper."

It may be likened to someone who stole a jewel and gave it to his daughter, telling her, "All that I have given you, you may wear in public. But this jewel is stolen. Wear it only indoors!" The *midrash* then continues, "Why, then, is it said aloud on Yom Kippur? Because then they are like angels, wearing white, not eating or drinking; nor do they have any sins or transgressions, for the Holy One has forgiven all their transgressions" (*Deuteronomy Rabba*, ed. S. Lieberman, 68-69).

INDEED, USUALLY we are not angels. Far from it. We have human needs and desires. We have impulses that can lead us to sin and transgression, as well as the ability to channel them and live a good life. We sin, all of us, in word, thought and deed. We are indeed human. The beauty of Judaism is that it recognizes our physical needs and our impulses. It does not seek to deny them, but rather to regulate them.

Judaism is far from an ascetic religion. The denial of the body is not praised or required. The pleasure of eating and drinking is acknowledged and is part of religious celebrations, but the act of eating is also controlled through the laws of *kashrut*. Sexual desires are considered normal and positive, but they too are controlled by the laws of marriage and family relations.

So too the desire for wealth. We are not commanded to live lives of poverty, but we are told to share what we have with others through acts of *tzedaka* and to acquire our wealth honestly. And we know we are not without sin, which is why we are given the opportunity of confession and *teshuva*, repentance.

On this one day, however, we are given a taste of eternity, an experience of something other-worldly. We are like the angels, or as close to it as human beings can get. When all physical needs are denied and canceled, we have a day when we can concentrate on other things, when we can pray, think, contemplate and lift ourselves to a higher level of consciousness than normal.

We begin with listening to the words of Kol Nidre, which conclude with the message: "I have forgiven as you have asked," the assurance that if we have properly repented during the last week, our sins have been blotted out. The burden of guilt has been lifted. Yes, all during the day we continue to confess our sins, but that serves to make us aware of what we should avoid from now on and help us to plan a purer life. We hear the words of Isaiah in the magnificent haftara that teaches us that all these actions, even fasting, are worthless if they do not lead to a life of help to others.

And at the closing of the day, we experience what can only be called an epiphany when we move beyond consciousness of hunger into a feeling of renewed strength as we proclaim our most sacred beliefs, repeating the Shema and the assertion that "the Lord is God" followed by that magnificent blast of the shofar - the shofar that proclaims liberty, liberty from human oppression, liberty from all that shackles the mind and the body. At that moment we may not become angels, but we become something no less exalted - human beings **.K.**

### ... Finding Comfort in the Unetaneh Tokef

*Koach is the college-age student group of the Conservative Movement, which periodically publishes materials written by college and graduate students as well as by scholars. This extract is drawn from an essay written in the Fall of 2000 by William Friedman, a student in the MIT class of 2002.*

The concepts of sin and repentance weigh heavily upon our minds as we enter the month of Elul, with the blowing of the shofar every morning and evening, with the daily, pre-dawn recitation of Selichot beginning the Shabbat preceding Rosh Hashanah, all finally culminating with the Yamim Noraim (Days of Awe) themselves, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

It is a time of reflection, on both the positive and

negative experiences of the previous year. We search for reasons for our joy and meaning in our tragedy. Fortunately, the liturgy of the Yamim Noraim helps us do just that--put our struggles and triumphs in context. With that in mind, we shall delve into a quintessential prayer of the Yamim Noraim, the Unetaneh Tokef, and examine the difficulties and, ultimately, the comforting solutions it offers.

The Unetaneh Tokef is a *piyyut* (poem) composed and introduced into the liturgy during the eleventh century CE (4700 - 4800). The poignant story is recorded in the Or Zarua. The bishop of Mainz had forcefully insisted his friend and advisor Rabbi Amnon convert to Christianity. R' Amnon was granted three days reprieve, at his own request. He spent them in solemn contemplation, afraid that even this delay would cause him to be looked upon askance, as if he were seriously considering the request. When he returned to the bishop at the end of the three days, and defiantly refused, R' Amnon was tortured and crippled. Three days later, on Rosh Hashanah, R' Amnon asked to be brought to the Aron (ark) before the hazzan's recitation of Kedushah. There R' Amnon recited the Unetaneh Tokef, and died.

Three days later, R' Amnon came to R' Kalonymus in a dream, and taught him the prayer. Whatever we think of the this latter part (perhaps the text is allegorically teaching that R' Kalonymus wrote the Unetaneh Tokef from memory of R' Amnon's recitation and disseminated the prayer as a tribute to a friend), the poignancy of this tale should add meaning to our own recitation of the Unetaneh Tokef this year in addition to helping us decipher it.

With the background understood, on to the contents.

The first paragraph declares the fearsome, awe-inspiring sanctity of the day (the Unetaneh Tokef is recited on both days of Rosh Hashanah as well as Yom Kippur). We acknowledge God's omniscience, God's flawless recall and constant witnessing of our deeds. The image of the open Book of Life is established, with all our names contained within. It continues with a beautiful contrasting image - the sounding of the great shofar (*u'vashofar gadol yitaka*) juxtaposed with the hearing of the still, small voice (*v'kol d'mamah dakah yishmah*), the latter familiar from Eliyahu's contact with God (I Kings 19:12), when he heard God's voice as a small, thin sound amongst powerful wind, grand noise, and fire.

The angels tremble at the awesomeness of the Yom HaDin (Day of Judgement), for their fate rests with ours. We imagine ourselves passing one by one in front of God in judgement, as a shepherd counts his sheep, an image derived from an erroneous reading of Mishnah Rosh Hashanah 1:2. The second paragraph contains the familiar reading of the fates of all that are inscribed for us on Rosh Hashanah and sealed on Yom Kippur.

Then we reach the crux of the Unetaneh Tokef - "*U'teshuvah, u'tefillah, u'tzedakah ma'avirin et ro'a ha-gezeirah*" - Repentance, prayer, and righteousness cancel/avert/remove the harsh/severe/evil decree. This is the counterpoint to the preceding paragraph; the prayer would have drowned in its own fatalism had it not been for this proud declaration of free will, of our inherent ability to change our ways and return to God.

(In the great Jewish tradition of tangible action over intangible intention, many mahzorim print the words "*Tzom, Kol, Mamon*" (Fast, Voice, Money) over *teshuvah, tefillah, and tzedakah*, respectively, to remind us that our intentions require actions to back them up.)

There is a problem here, however - free will extends only so far. We are still victims of random catastrophes, both natural and as a result of others' misuse of free will (what we often call "evil"), and no amount of teshuvah, tefillah, and tzedakah can avert that. One ingenious (if ahistorical) solution, is to note the root of *ma'avirin* is *avar* - to cross over or to transcend, and thus interpret the line as "teshuvah, tefillah, and tzedakah transcend the severe decree", as if they are coping mechanisms.

As accurate as that may be, it doesn't deal directly with the issue at hand, nor with the *p'shat* (plain meaning) that Rabbi Amnon intended.

We must be honest and admit that God's ways are often inscrutable to us. Reading the fates listed in the preceding paragraph of the Unetaneh Tokef, the listing of the many possible methods of death is striking. It seems redundant--death is death. But then the paragraph lists the various fates of those inscribed for life (who will wander, who will have rest, etc.), and we are able to identify with that, for we know that quality of life can vary greatly.

It should not be so difficult to imagine, then, that to God, quality of death can also vary greatly. What

seems to us a uniform *ro'a ha-gezeira* may have different meanings to God. (We are even able to relate to this--it is common to be glad that one dies naturally quickly rather than slowly in a particular situation.) Even for Rabbi Amnon, his teshuvah, tefillah, and tzedakah, and indeed his death at kiddush Hashem (on the sanctification of God's name) averted the more severe possibility that his hesitation at refusing to convert would lead the less committed in the community to apostasy.

The challenge of all this lies in realizing that we can never know (and often tragically underestimate) the extent to which our own actions can influence our fate; we must thus strive daily to perfect ourselves, our community, and the world.

The comfort is in knowing that God is our companion in change, that God desires it even more than we, for as we conclude in the Unetaneh Tokef "*v'ad yom moto t'chakeh lo, im yashuv miyad t'kab'lo*"--"Until the day of his death You await him; if he repents You will accept him immediately." Shanah Tovah. **.K.**

### . . . Revisioning the Unetaneh Tokef

*This interpretive view of the Unetaneh Tokef was written by Rabbi Jack Reimer. Some may remember Rabbi Reimer from when then-President Bill Clinton read the rabbi's "A Time for Turning" at a National Prayer Breakfast.*

Let us ask ourselves hard questions  
For this is the time for truth.

How much time did we waste  
In the year that is now gone?

Did we fill our days with life  
Or were they dull and empty?

Was there love inside our home  
Or was the affectionate word left unsaid?

Was there a real companionship with our children  
Or was there a living together and a growing apart?

Were we a help to our mates  
Or did we take them for granted?

How was it with our friends:  
Were we there when they needed us or not?

The kind deed: did we perform it or postpone it?  
The unnecessary gibe: did we say it or hold it back?

Did we live by false values?  
Did we deceive others?  
Did we deceive ourselves?

Were we sensitive to the rights and feelings  
Of those who worked for us?

Did we acquire only possessions  
Or did we acquire new insights as well?

Did we fear what the crowd would say  
And keep quiet when we should have spoken out?

Did we mind only our own business  
Or did we feel the heartbreak of others?

Did we live right,  
And if not,  
Then have we learned, and will we change? **.K.**

### **... Tashlich: Casting Away The Sins**

*(An extract from the writings of Rabbi Moshe Lazarus)*

The "Tashlich" prayer is said on the first afternoon of Rosh Hashana by a body of water that preferably has fish in it. These prayers are symbolic of the casting away of our mistakes. Of course, it is foolish to think you can rid sins by shaking out your pockets. Rather, the Jewish approach is deep introspection and commitment to change. Indeed, the whole idea of "Tashlich" is partly to commemorate the Midrash that says when Abraham went to the *Akeida* (binding of Isaac), he had to cross through water up to his neck

If Rosh Hashana falls out on Shabbat, "Tashlich" is pushed off until the second day. If "Tashlich" was not said on Rosh Hashana itself, it may be said anytime during the Ten Days of Repentance.

Both the body of water and the fish are symbolic. In Talmudic literature, Torah is represented as water. Just as fish can't live without water, so too a Jew can't live without Torah! Also, the fact that fish's eyes never close serve to remind us that, so too, God's eyes (so to speak) never close; He knows of our every move.

This is the text of "Tashlich" . . .

*Who is like You, God, who removes iniquity and overlooks transgression of the remainder of His inheritance. He doesn't remain angry forever because He desires kindness. He will return and He will be merciful to us, and He will conquer our iniquities, and He will cast them into the depths of the seas.*

*Give truth to Jacob, kindness to Abraham like that you swore to our ancestors from long ago.*

*From the straits I called upon God, God answered me with expansiveness. God is with me, I will not be afraid, what can man do to me? God is with me to help me, and I will see my foes (annihilated). It is better to take refuge in God than to trust in man. It is better to take refuge in God, that to rely on nobles.*

Many people also read Psalms 33 and 130. **.K.**

### **... So Many Foods, So Little Time**

*(Excerpted from an essay, "Apples and Honey and More Foods for a Happy New Year", by Sheilah Kaufman.)*

At no time during the year, with the possible exception of Passover, does food symbolism take center-stage more than at Rosh Hashanah.

We're all familiar with eating sweet foods, especially apples dipped in honey, to usher in a sweet New Year. Many traditional Jews refrain from eating sour or bitter foods such as pickles and horseradish since they may interfere with the sweetness of the festival.

The Talmud and other sources identify a number of other foods considered propitious to eat as we enter a new year. "On Rosh Hashanah, the performance of symbolic acts is of special value in reflecting on the past and pondering the future," Rabbi Gil Marks writes in *The World of Jewish Cooking*.

[ . . . ] Here are a handful of explanations about auspicious foods associated with Rosh HaShanah:

*Pomegranates*, often the new fruit we eat on the second night of Rosh HaShanah, are said to have 613 seeds, precisely the number of mitzvot, commandments that Jews are responsible for fulfilling. It reminds us of the hope that the "new year will be filled with as many good deeds as the pomegranate has seeds."

Pumpkin or gourds have thick skins, and food made from them expresses the hope that "as this vegetable has been protected by a thick skin, God will protect us and gird us with strength."

Black-eyed Peas: The Aramaic name for black-eyed peas, *rubiya* or *lubiya* sounds similar to the Hebrew word for "many" and thus express our hope for fertility and success.

Leeks or Cabbage: *Karsi* is the Hebrew word for leek, which sounds like the word *kares* "to cut off/destroy," and a blessing is said that requests "may our adversaries be removed."

Beetroot: In English translation, the stress is on our desire to "beat" those who intend to do us harm, again may our adversaries be removed. Beets in biblical times were not beetroot, but beet greens since roots did not come about until Italy in the 15th century.

Dates: Sweet dates are served to symbolize the wish that the New Year will be equally sweet. The word for dates sounds like the word *sheyitamu*, which means "that they be consumed," referring to may our enemies be consumed. While most Sephardic Jews eat the dates plain some Moroccan Jews dip the dates in a mixture of ground sesame seeds, anise seeds and powdered sugar. (Apples are also dipped in this mixture).

Apples and Honey, the most familiar of the Rosh Hashanah food customs, are sweet and associated with land of Israel. Milk and honey are ancient symbols of immortality and truth and honey does not decay. The roundness of the apple symbolizes a hope that the New Year will be a joyous one from beginning to end. By dipping an apple in honey we wish for a sweet New Year.

Rubia / fenugreek sounds like the Hebrew word *yirbu* (increase), so we pray for our merits to increase — *meren* (carrots) can also mean to increase.

Sheep or Fish Heads: Rosh Hashanah literally means "head of the year." The sheep or fish head symbolizes the hope that each of us will be at the head, rather than the tail, of whatever we do. **.K.**

**... When a Citrus is No Lemon**

Lulav and Etrog: the Personal Mitzvah



*Some people go to great lengths to precisely and joyfully fulfill the mitzvot associated with lulav and etrog, including personally selecting them for purchase from qualified sources. While they may also be purchased with confidence through KCT, those wishing to select their own, may be guided by this brief overview drawn from several respected sources among many in the Jewish community.*

". . . And you shall take for yourselves on the first day (of Sukkot) the fruit of a goodly tree, a palm branch, the myrtle branch, and the willow of the brook; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days" (*Leviticus 23*). The Shulchan Aruch gives precise specifications concerning the requirements of form, appearance, and texture of the Arba Minim (the Four Species): Etrog, Lulav, Hadassim, Aravot.

#### The Etrog

A superior *Etrog* is of medium size, its bright yellow surface is furrowed and covered with *Blitos*, bumps (which distinguishes it from the ordinary lemon). Another criterion of the etrog is its need to be grown from a strain that is not grafted with another fruit. To be considered ritually fit, the Etrog must be shaped "like a tower"--its bottom larger than its top. The *Pitom*, the flowered blossom at the tip of the fruit, and *Uketz*, the stem which is sunk into the broad base, must be examined carefully to make sure that both are present and intact. (To avoid the problem of the pitom falling off, many people prefer to use Etrogim which grow without Pitoms) The Pitom should be directly in line above the Uketz

#### The Lulav

The Lulav is a small, young branch of the date palm. The leaves--two-fold and spear-headed--are linked to a solid central stem. Near the pointed tip of the

Lulav, the spine splits into two double-leaves called *Te-yomes*, twins. The points of the *Te-yomes* should not be split. The backs of the leaves should be light green, the fronts white. A select Lulav has a straight spine, against which the leaves lie flat, covering and overlapping one another.



#### Hadassim

The oval leaves of the *Hadass* cover the myrtle branch from top to bottom in groups of three, growing from one stem. The top of the branches should not be broken off, and should overlap the stems of the upper leaves. Three Hadassim are required for the mitzvah of the Arba Minim.

#### Aravot

The *Arava*, willow requires a great amount of water, and so it is commonly found near streams, ponds, or rivers. Select Aravot have long, slender green leaves with smooth edges, and a straight, reddish stem. Two Aravot are needed to complete the Arba Minim.

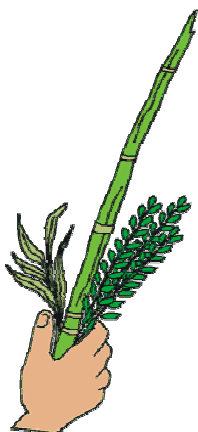
Each set of arba minim therefore includes one etrog, one lulav, three haddasim and two aravot.

The Four Species all taken together make up one single mitzvah. If any of the species are missing then one has not fulfilled the Mitzvah. The four species are not taken on Shabbat even if Shabbat is the first day of Sukkot. The Mitzvah does not apply at night.

#### *Arba Minim*: Gathering and Shaking

So what do we do with them, now that we have them?

Take the Lulav and hold it in your right hand (unless you're a lefty) with the spine facing you, and say:



**Boruch attah Ado-nai Elo-heinu melech ha'olam, asher kidishanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu al netilat lulav.**

*[Blessed are You God our God King of the Universe who has sanctified us with his commandments and commanded us regarding taking the lulav.]*

Other than the first day of the holiday (or the first day when you perform the mitzvah), the etrog is lifted right after the blessing, and the shaking commences. On the first day of the holiday, (or your first time), while still holding the lulav, pick up the etrog in your left hand and recite the following blessing. (Toward the end of the blessing put the etrog and lulav together):

**Boruch attah Ado-nai Elo-heinu melech ha'olam she'hechyanu, vikimanu, vi'higi'anu lazman hazeh.**

*[Blessed are You God our God King of the Universe who has granted us life, sustained us and enables us to reach this occasion.]*

There are varying customs, including holding the etrog upside down during the blessing, and then turning it over for the shaking. If you travel to other communities during the holiday, you might wish to observe and note the different *minhagim*. **.K.**

**.... Shofrot: All Shapes and Sizes**

No matter what shape your shofar is, long or short, curved or straight, if you know how to sound it, have it in shul with you for Neilah and join with our *Ba'al Shofar*, Harvey Goldstein for the concluding notes of Yom Kinnur



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