

RESOURCE GUIDE for the DAYS OF AWE

Cong. Beth Ahm / New Year 5778 – Fall 2017

Recommended Websites – Articles, Podcasts, Videos

Recommended Books

Essence of Elul

Engaging with Elul as a Family

A Parable for Elul: The King is in the Field

**From a Hasidic Master: A Spiritual Exercise
for the Days of Awe**

Be Strong, Be Trusting: Reading Psalm 27 in Elul

Dressing in White on Yom Kippur

Wearing a White Kittel on the High Holy Days

Meditation before Yom Kippur for One Who Cannot Fast

**Yom Kippur and the Tradition of
Remembering Souls on the Other Side**

When Yom Kippur Prayers Don't Help Grieving

RECOMMENDED WEBSITES – ARTICLES, PODCASTS, VIDEOS

BASIC OVERVIEWS

Judaism 101: The Month of Elul and Selichot - <http://www.iewfaq.org/elul.html>
<http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/rosh-hashanah-2017/>
<http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/the-ten-days-of-repentance/>
<http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/yom-kippur-2017/>
<http://elitalks.org/religion>

How have you changed in the past year? Who will you become in the year to come? Answer 10 Q's in a digital interactive experience on Sept 20. Join us at www.doyou10Q.com.

MORE IN-DEPTH

The Shalom Hartman Institute Explores the High Holidays: Days of Awe 5778
<http://tinyurl.com/yamwqmt2>

The Masorti Movement's new Yom Kippur booklet, "Open The Gates"
<http://tinyurl.com/y8z635ep>

Mechon Hadar Torah collections for the Days of Awe – articles and podcasts
<https://www.hadar.org/torah-collection/rosh-hashanah>
<https://www.hadar.org/torah-collection/yom-kippur>

"The Month of Elul and Second Chances" by Rabbi Alex Israel
<http://www.alexisrael.org/elul---second-chances>

Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies (Jerusalem) Online Learning Portal
<http://elmad.pardes.org/topic/holidays/the-high-holy-days/>

JTS Torah Online for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur – <http://tinyurl.com/ydejanma>

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

S. Y. Agnon (editor), *Days of Awe: A Treasury of Jewish Wisdom for Reflection, Repentance, and Renewal on the High Holy Days*

Erica Brown, *Return: Daily Inspiration for the Days of Awe*

Jeffrey Cohen - *Prayer and Penitence: A Commentary to the High Holy Day Machzor / 1,000 Questions and Answers on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur*

Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman (editor) - *Prayers of Awe* – a multi-volume series exploring the High Holiday liturgy

All the World: Universalism, Particularism, and the High Holy Days
May God Remember: Memory and Memorializing in Judaism / Yizkor
All These Vows: Kol Nidrei Prayers
Who by Fire, Who by Water: Un'taneh Tokef
We Have Sinned: Sin and Confession in Judaism – Ashamnu and Al Chet
Naming God: Avinu Malkeinu - Our Father, Our King
Encountering God: El Rachum v' Chanun - God Merciful and Gracious

Rabbi Dov Peretz Elkins (editor) -
Rosh Hashanah Readings – Inspiration, Information and Contemplation
Yom Kippur Readings – Inspiration, Information and Contemplation

Marcia Falk, *The Days Between: Blessings, Poems, And Directions of the Heart for the Jewish High Holiday Season*

Rabbi Reuven Hammer, *Entering the High Holy Days: A Complete Guide*

Phillip Goodman, *The Rosh Hashanah Anthology / The Yom Kippur Anthology*

Rabbi Lawrence Kushner and Rabbi Nehemia Polen, *Filling Words with Light: Hasidic and Mystical Reflections on Jewish Prayer*

Rabbi Alan Lew, *This is Real and You are Completely Unprepared: The Days of Awe as a Journey of Transformation*

Dr. Louis E. Newman, *Repentance: The Meaning and Practice of Teshuvah*

Rabbis Kerry M. Olitzky and Rachel Sabath, *Preparing Your Heart for the High Holy Days*

Gail Twersky Riemer and Judith A. Kates (editors), *Beginning Anew: A Woman's Companion to the High Holy Days*

Essence of Elul

From the Sourcebook for Leaders, written by Rabbi *Rachel* Gartner and Barbara Berley Melits, for *Rosh Hodesh: It's a Girl Thing!* This experiential program was created by Kolot: The Center for Jewish Women's and Gender Studies to strengthen the Jewish identity and self-esteem of adolescent girls through monthly celebrations of the New Moon festival. The program is now available through Moving Traditions.

Fast Facts

Elul is the sixth of the twelve months in the Jewish calendar.

Elul comes at the same time as the secular months of August/September.

The *mazal* (constellation) for Elul is Virgo (betulah) a young, independent woman.

It is taught that the Hebrew letters ELUL (aleph, lamed, vav, lamed) are an acronym for the verse from Shir HaShirim (Song of Songs), Ani L'Dodi V'Dodi Li - I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine. In Elul we celebrate women's ability to maintain our independence, individuality, and uniqueness at the same time that we enter into relationships and recommit ourselves to those we love.

Elul is a time of intense spiritual preparation for the coming year and the upcoming High Holy Days (in Tishrei).

In Aramaic (the language spoken by Jews living at the time that the months were given names), the word "Elul" means "search." Elul is a time to search our hearts.

Features

It is customary to:

Blow the *shofar* every morning (except on *Shabbat*) from Rosh Hodesh Elul until the day before *Rosh HaShanah*. The blasts are meant to awaken our spirits and inspire us to begin the soul searching which prepares us for the High Holy Days. As part of this preparation, Elul is the time to begin the sometimes-difficult process of granting and asking for forgiveness.

According to tradition, *Moshe* went up to Mount *Sinai* on Rosh Hodesh Elul to receive the second set of tablets upon which the Ten Commandments were inscribed. *Moses* then spent the next 40 days on the mountain, returning to the people on *Yom Kippur*. The first time *Moshe* went up to the mountain the people worshipped the Golden Calf because they miscalculated the 40 day period after which they expected *Moshe* to return. When *Moshe* did not come down at the appointed time, the people created the

Golden Calf to lead them in his stead. Tradition teaches that when Moshe went up to the mountain the second time, a shofar was sounded throughout the encampment, so everyone would know exactly from when to begin counting the 40 days until his return.

Recite psalm 27 every day from Rosh Hodesh Elul through the middle of *Sukkot* (in Tishrei). Psalm 27 begins with the words "God is my light and my helper, whom shall I fear?" The challenging spiritual work of Elul is made easier when we feel that God is with us as we strive to bring out the best in ourselves.

Recite selichot – special penitential prayers – either every morning just before sunrise during the week before *Rosh HaShanah* (*Ashkenazic* tradition) or every morning during the entire month of Elul (*Sephardic* tradition). *Ashkenazi* Jews begin the recitation of selichot with a special service held at midnight on the Saturday before Rosh HaShanah.

Visit the graves of loved ones throughout the month in order to remember and honor those people in our past who inspire us to live more fully in the future.

Begin all letters written during the month of Elul with wishes that the recipient have a good year. Others write that expressing these wishes can be done at the end of the letter as well. The standard blessing is *K'tiva V'Chatima Tova* (a good writing and sealing), meaning that the person should be written and sealed in the Book of Life.

Foods

In Europe, Elul arrived when the plums were purple and ripe and the pears were ready for picking. Jews called Elul the time of the "Flaumen un die Beren" (the plums and pears). In Yiddish these two words have additional meanings: "Flaumen" means flames, and "Beren" means to burn. Thus Elul is a time to search our hearts, and to seek God with fiery, burning intensity. Enjoy plums and pears as you do so!

This article was downloaded from the Ritual Well website:

<https://ritualwell.org/ritual/essence-elul>

Engaging with Elul as a Family

from an article by Sarah Chandler

The Jewish month of Elul precedes Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. In order to observe these High Holidays in the most meaningful way, we must adequately prepare ourselves during Elul. This article gives a brief background on some of the traditional customs and legends connected to the month of Elul, as well as suggestions for how to engage these rituals as a family. Doing these simple family activities during the month of Elul is a great way to spend time together and teaches our children that as Jews, we live our lives in sync with our own special calendar.

The Sound of the Shofar: Wake up and Listen!

Gather your family around to blow the shofar! On weekday mornings during the month of Elul, the daily prayer service ends with a single blast of the shofar. The extreme volume of the blast peaks our senses, serving as a daily reminder that Rosh Hashanah, the Day of Judgment, is on its way. We must focus our souls, take stock of the year, and reach deep down into our hearts to ask for forgiveness. The call of this horn also reminds us that our words – our sounds– have extreme power. Listening to the voice of the shofar, we are reminded that we too must listen to pleas of forgiveness. With simple phrases–“I’m sorry” or “I forgive you”–we can repair broken relationships, or deepen our most meaningful human connections.

Blowing a shofar or even a symbolic toy horn each morning as you count the days of Elul is a great way to gather the family together before a busy day. Whether everyone is going their separate ways to school and work, or the family is setting off together for a day at the beach, setting aside a few moments for this ritual can engage your children’s interest in this important season. Talk to your children about the concept of “forgiveness.” As the month progresses, leave a few minutes after the shofar blowing to talk about forgiveness among enemies, friends, family, and even between God and the individual. Take time for personal reflection, including writing or meditation. Encourage your kids to share their goals for asking and receiving forgiveness, and share your own as well. Check in as the month goes on, offering praise for diligence and progress.

When your family arrives in the synagogue on Rosh Hashanah and finally hears the first of the traditional 100 blasts, your children will connect this now-familiar sound to their hard work of the past month.

Rosh Hodesh Elul: A New Year for the Animals *

According to the Mishna, the first of Elul, was to be considered a Rosh Hashanah (beginning of a new year) in respect to the tithing of animals (Rosh Hashanah 1:1). In ancient times, this designation gave a clear date from which to determine your yearly

donation of animals for the priestly class. However, in post-Temple times this custom fell out of practice, and no symbolic replacement was made.

How can we, as modern Jews, find a way to commemorate this ancient ritual? We can choose to celebrate the day, or a free day that week, as a special day for all animals. Visit a farm, aquarium, or a zoo, volunteer at an animal shelter, or even just rent an interesting movie about animals.

If your children are old enough, you may want to talk to them about kosher slaughtering and even visit a place where you can witness it firsthand.

Another suggestion: read the quotation below from Job 12:7-8: "But ask the beasts, and they will teach you; The birds of the sky, they will tell you, Or speak to the earth, it will teach you; The fish of the sea, they will inform you." Then, go on a nature walk with your kids, making a list together of all the things they would like to learn from animals.

** Beth Ahm note: Even though Rosh Hodesh Elul has already taken place this year, families can still use the above resource to enrich the Elul experience.*

Moses in the Cleft of the Rock

Starting on the first Saturday night before Rosh Hashanah, we begin to recite the daily selichot service, a series of penitential prayers that overlap in form, theme and content with sections of the High Holiday liturgy. One of the sections that is repeated many times both in this service and then later in the high holiday liturgy is the passage enumerating the thirteen attributes of mercy. In the original text from Exodus, Moses asks God for permission to "see" God face to face: Ex. 33:18-23: He [Moses] said [to God], "Oh, let me behold Your Presence!" And He answered, "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim before you the name LORD, and the grace that I grant and the compassion that I show. But," He said, "you cannot see My face, for man may not see Me and live." And the LORD said, "See, there is a place near Me. Station yourself on the rock and, as My Presence passes by, I will put you in a cleft of the rock and shield you with My hand until I have passed by. Then I will take My hand away and you will see My back; but My face must not be seen."

Soon afterward, God proclaims the thirteen attributes of God: "Ex. 34:6-7: The LORD passed before him and proclaimed: 'The LORD! the LORD! a God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in kindness and faithfulness, extending kindness to the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; yet He does not remit all punishment...'"

The mystery in this story lies in what Moses actually sees. The Torah likely did not mean to imply that God takes a literal human form. Rather, God gives Moses a glimpse of the world by looking over God's shoulder; in other words, Moses sees the world from God's perspective. Elul is about trying to understand the impact that our actions have on other people. Perhaps when Moses says "Let me behold Your Presence," God's

response isn't about literally seeing God from Moses' perspective, but affording Moses the opportunity to see the world from God's perspective.

Take turns looking over each other's shoulders. If your family members have significant height differences, pick each other up or stand on chairs to get higher, or bend down to get lower. Lie down on the grass and see the world perspective of the ants; follow around your pet dog or baby sister by crawling. What do you see now that you couldn't before?

Now think back to someone you are asking forgiveness from, or someone you need to need to forgive. Is there something you are not seeing because you are too stubborn to look at the situation from their perspective?

Recalling our Ancestors: A Visit to the Cemetery

We chant in the Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur service: "On Rosh Hashanah it is written, on Yom Kippur it is sealed. Who shall live, and who shall die..." For some, the image of God inscribing every name in either the book of life or death is compelling enough to provoke quick repentance.

As we count down to Yom Kippur, on which we will act "dead" by fasting and otherwise subjugating our physical needs, we prepare ourselves for the clean slate we will receive. By reviewing our lives and making amends, we afford ourselves the opportunity for a fresh start in the New Year.

How can we use this season to teach our children the value of righteous living? It is traditional to visit cemeteries in the month of Elul. A brief visit to the graves of relatives is a tremendous opportunity for parents and other family members to share fond memories of their departed loved ones. Children love hearing family narratives, and will listen more closely to a story a righteous person than a lecture on how and why to do the right thing. If a cemetery visit is not an option, bring out photographs and other remembrances of your departed loved ones. Elul is a gift, allowing us take time for self reflection in the weeks before the holidays begin. By integrating even a few of these renewed versions of ancient self-examination rituals, you and your family can find relevance and meaning as you approach the High Holidays.

Please note that not all activities are suitable for young children; parents should use their discretion in how to incorporate them for their respective families.

Adapted from an article originally posted on myjewishlearning.com

A MASHAL (PARABLE): IN THE MONTH OF ELUL

“The King is in the Field”

Elul, the last month of the Jewish year, is a time of paradox. The Jewish calendar distinguishes between two qualities of time: “mundane” work days, and “holy” days, such as Shabbat and the festivals. Shabbat is a day of disinvolvement from all material endeavor, a day devoted to the spiritual pursuits of study and prayer. The festivals which dot the year are likewise transcendental oases in time, each providing its unique spiritual quality (freedom on Passover, awe on Rosh HaShanah, etc.) to the journey through calendar and life.

In this respect, the month of Elul resembles the “holy” portions of the calendar. Elul is a haven in time, a “city of refuge” from the ravages of material life; a time to audit one’s spiritual accounts and assess the year gone by; to prepare for the “Days of Awe” of Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur by repenting the failings of the past and resolving for the future; to immerse oneself in Torah study, prayer and charitable activities. Elul is the opportune time for all this because it is a month in which God relates to us in a more open and compassionate manner than He does in the other months of the year. In the terminology of Kabbalah, it is a time when God’s “thirteen attributes of mercy” illuminate His relationship with us.

And yet, unlike Shabbat and the festivals, the days of Elul are workdays. On Shabbat, the Torah commands us to cease all materially constructive work (*melachah*). The festivals, too, are days on which *melachah* is forbidden. Regarding the month of Elul, however, there are no such restrictions. The transcendent activities of Elul are conducted amidst our workday lives in the field, shop or office.

Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi explains the paradox of Elul with the following metaphor: The king’s usual place is in the capital city, in the royal palace. Anyone wishing to approach the king must go through the appropriate channels in the palace bureaucracy and gain the approval of a succession of royal secretaries and ministers. He must journey to the capital and pass through the many gates, corridors and antechambers that lead to the throne room. His presentation must be meticulously prepared, and he must adhere to an exacting code of dress, speech and mannerism upon entering into the royal presence.

However, there are times when the king comes out to the fields outside the city. At such times, anyone can approach him; the king receives them all with a smiling face and a radiant countenance. The peasant behind his plow has access to the king in a manner unavailable to the highest ranking minister in the royal court when the king is in the palace. The month of Elul, says Rabbi Schneur Zalman, is when the king is in the field.

FROM A HASIDIC MASTER: A SPIRITUAL EXERCISE FOR THE DAYS OF AWE

Rabbi Bunam, a Hasidic master, taught his students:

Everyone must have two pockets, so that he can reach into the one or the other, according to his needs. In his right pocket are to be the words, “The whole world was created for my sake” and in his left pocket are to be the words, “I am but dust and ashes.”

- from *Tales of the Hasidism* by Martin Buber

WRITE THESE WORDS ON TWO PIECES OF PAPER:

“The whole world was created for my sake”

“I am but dust and ashes”

PUT ONE PIECE OF PAPER IN EACH POCKET AND CARRY THEM
WITH YOU BETWEEN NOW AND THE END OF SUKKOT

Be Strong, Be Trusting: Reading Psalm 27 in Elul

By Robert Pollack



There is a ritual this time of year that takes a bit more than 50 days. We have been reading a particular psalm that is not otherwise part of the siddur—Psalm 27—every morning and every night through the month of Elul, and we will continue this until Simḥat Torah. Through our daily reading of Psalm 27—so like the daily counting of the Omer—we make this autumnal period, with its linear narrative of atonement, redemption, and the renewal of Torah, into a second version of the vernal Pesah-Shavuot narrative and give each year not one, but two special, sacred Sevenths.

There is no right or wrong way, only more or less interesting ways of understanding Psalm 27 or any other deep text. For example, in the eyes of the Anchor Bible, a work of serious scholarship from another tradition, this psalm's roots lie in earlier texts in other Semitic languages, and they show that it is entirely about the Afterlife, but that's not what I see. In sharing my interpretations here I intend only to share my way of experiencing these Holy Days. How then do I read Psalm 27? Let's take a look.

It is—first but not foremost—beautiful poetry. Having even a little Hebrew helps a lot, because the poetry that lies in the sounds, their resonance and dissonances, gets lost in translation. I'll transliterate the Hebrew where necessary; otherwise I'll refer to this translation from the Jewish Publication Society's 1999 Tanakh.

David was a King of many voices and moods. I read this entire psalm as a stream of thought in David's head, not as a spoken or written text, until the last line, 14, where I see and hear a vocal outburst that summarizes the whole psalm. To my eye the psalm breaks into five silent stanzas before then, each with its own emotional tone: lines 1-3, 4-6, 7-10, 11-12, and 13. The stanzas get shorter as the poet's introspective mood gets at once more agitated and elevated, so that when the last line comes, an astonishing optimism breaks through the dark cloud of David's self-doubt.

In the silent, inner cycle that oscillates between the intensity of personal prayer and the relief of communal worship, Psalm 27 falls completely on the side of the personal; it is profoundly moving, even disturbing, in its ability to convey an inner voice in intimate communication with Adonai. Certainly it is the right time for us to be given this chance to hear David as he struggles. It is a daily reminder of this obligation we are all under, this time of year, to get past our cleverness and confess our hidden thoughts and secret actions to Adonai. As Moshe says in Parashat Ki Tavo [Devarim 29:28], “Ha’nistarot La’Adonai Eloheikhem / Concealed acts concern the Lord our God.” Like confession at any other time of year, fully feeling the meaning of this psalm, while theoretically possible at another time, might just be too painful outside of this special seventh of the year.

Psalm 27

- 1** The Lord is my light and my help; whom should I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; whom should I dread?
- 2** When evil men assail me to devour my flesh— it is they, my foes and my enemies, who stumble and fall.
- 3** Should an army besiege me, my heart would have no fear; should war beset me, still would I be confident.
- 4** One thing I ask of the Lord, only that do I seek: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord, to frequent His temple.
- 5** He will shelter me in His pavilion on an evil day; grant me the protection of His tent; raise me high upon a rock.
- 6** Now is my head high over my enemies roundabout; I sacrifice in His tent with shouts of joy; singing and chanting a hymn to the Lord.
- 7** Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud, have mercy on me, answer me.
- 8** In Your behalf my heart says: “Seek My face!” O Lord, I seek Your face.
- 9** Do not hide Your face from me; do not thrust aside Your servant in anger; You have ever been my help. Do not forsake me, do not abandon me, O God, my deliverer.
- 10** Though my father and mother abandon me, the Lord will take me in.
- 11** Show me Your way, O Lord; and lead me on a level path, because of my watchful foes.
- 12** Do not subject me to the will of my foes; for false witnesses and unjust accusers have appeared against me.

13 Had I not the assurance that I would enjoy the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living...

14 Look to the Lord; be strong, and of good courage! O look to the Lord!

1-3 Here David is someone trying to convince himself of something he wishes he could believe. The very first words, the beginning of line 1, set a high standard for density and depth, even for a psalm of David: “Adonai ori veyish’i, mimi eera? / Adonai is my light and my salvation, whom should I fear?” Ori/eera; light/fear: it is a great example of the distinctions we are supposed to seek, and the words look and sound enough alike to make each illuminate the other. But then, in line 2, the fear breaks through: “When evil men assail me to devour my flesh / ’l’ekhol et-b’sarai’ ” ... they will stumble and fall.” Devour my flesh? Maybe a hyperbole, maybe not; in any event, line 3 concludes that even so, “B’zot ani boteaḥ / In this I would still trust,” that is, that David would trust in Adonai’s salvation, no matter what.

4-6 Here David daydreams: He will live in the house of the Lord, Adonai will shelter him, raise him high. All will be well, better than well: “V’ata yarum roshi al oi’vai s’vivotai/now my head is held high over my enemies surrounding me.” How then will David rejoice? With “sacrifice in Adonai’s tent with shouts of joy / V’ezbakha b’ahalo ziv’khai t’ruah,” and with singing and chanting a hymn to Adonai. Three possessive words now snap into sharp focus: “B’sarai; S’vivotai; Ziv’khai / my flesh; surrounding me; my sacrifice.” S’vivotai is the critical link: In Vayikra 1:11, intended to be read every morning at prayer even today, we repeat that the Kohanim were to take the blood of the animal sacrificed at the Temple in Jerusalem and dash it “upon the Altar, all around / Damo al ha’mizbeaḥ saviv.” The daydream teeters on the edge of a nightmare: Is David dreaming of being the sacrificer, or the sacrifice?

7-10 Another jump in the narrative. Away with the daydream, back to the reality: David calls to Adonai and cries that he is not sure his call is heard. And who of us does not know that feeling? Here the words in English and in Hebrew convey panic and fright with blunt force: “Do not forsake me, do not abandon me, do not hide your face from me;” nothing subtle here, nor particularly poetical. The worst fear breaks through in line 10: “Ki avi v’imi azvuni, va’Adonai ya’asfeni / though my father and mother abandon me, Adonai will take me in.” Given the previous two lines, do we really think David is certain of this? I am told by good friends that the root of ya’asfeni is to receive in order to guide or teach, and that the line should be read as saying that even if I am so rotten that my parents give up on me, Adonai will find a way for me to become a good person. I wish I could feel the force of that interpretation, but that is not the effect this line has on me. As I am an orphan, the simpler meaning overwhelms me.

11-12 David pulls himself together and tries to focus on difficulties at hand. False accusers surround him, and his head is not at all held high above them; he needs a way out and asks Adonai to show him that path, past his watchful foes. These two lines are reasonable, practical, and altogether different from anything that has come before.

It is as if David has snapped to attention, seen that time is short, and gotten to the point. But, there is no answer!

13 The strain of Adonai's silence is too much; back to the daydream: "had I not the assurance that I would enjoy the goodness of Adonai in the land of the living ... / Lulei he'emanutai lir-ot b'tuv-Adonai b'eretx Kha'yim..." In the Hebrew, Lulei is surrounded by the sort of dots that mark of a word troublesome to the keepers of this text a thousand years ago, and rightly so; this is a wholly ambiguous line. The Anchor Bible translates Lulei as "The Victor," based on linguistic overlaps with other cultures, but to me this line is simply David in a voice of great anxiety. What, for instance, are we to make of "b'eretx Kha'yim / the land of the living?" Is that this world, the world to come, or—as the Artscroll commentary concludes—the land of Israel? David is as broken as this line is broken; he is not sure that he is going to survive this moment.

14 The mood shifts again, dramatically: David will not give up and die. He remembers the b'rit between Adonai and his—and our—ancestors and knows he will prevail. Here comes the most powerful line in the psalm and perhaps the most dense line I have ever come across, anywhere. "Kavey el-Adonai, Khazak v'ya'ameitz libeha, v'kavey el-Adonai. / hope in Adonai, make yourself strong and give your heart courage, and hope in Adonai." This line is all by itself a cycle, the tightest of the cycles I have come across in our ritual, the cycle that is the b'rit. From the very beginning of the Book of Joshua, Adonai tells Joshua "Khazak v' ematz / be strong and resolute" many times, and of course Joshua is, and so we are alive today as Jews. But do we really think that this strength is what won the day for Joshua, or for us?

Psalm 27 teaches us, instead, what the entire narrative of these days—from Selihot through Simhat Torah—teaches us: that as Jews we are to hope in Adonai; and then we are to do everything we can to strengthen ourselves as if we were wholly left to our own fates; and then we are to continue to hope in Adonai despite having acted as if we were wholly on our own. That's all we can do for our side of the b'rit; Adonai will respond to us in ways neither David, nor I, nor you, can know, nor need to know.

Professor Robert Pollack and his wife Amy have been members of B'nai Jeshurun since 1994. This article was posted on the BJ website www.bj.org in Sept. 2010.

“Dressing in White on Yom Kippur”

Adapted from an article by Alvin Stern, former Ritual Director at Temple Beth Sholom, a Conservative shul in Cherry Hill, NJ – reprinted with his permission

On Yom Kippur, it is customary to wear white – white shirts, white dresses, white blouses and a white *kittel* over our street clothes. The wearing of white has several significant reasons:

- A white piece of paper is a blank slate; as we start a new year, our records are clean. We have the opportunity each year to have good (or bad) deeds recorded on our ledgers, but we are given the chance each year to start anew.
- White reminds us of purity, free of sins. Just as the Torah scrolls are “dressed” in pure white mantles, so too, we come to shul on Yom Kippur as pure souls, not contaminated with our mundane concerns of eating, what jewelry to wear or what fragrance to apply. On Yom Kippur, we come “baring” our souls to God, and signify this with wearing white.
- When a Jew is buried, he or she is wrapped in a white shroud. The wearing of white, and especially the *kittel*, reminds us that one day, we, too, will be wearing this white garment; and therefore, we come to shul on Yom Kippur truly praying for the gift of life for the coming year. This adds a certain sense of solemnity to Yom Kippur. Though the day is not a sad one, it is certainly a very serious, solemn Day of Awe.

In addition to wearing white on Yom Kippur, we also don't wear leather garments, shoes or belts. Leather comes from an animal that was killed in order for us to use the hide. It would be a matter of *chutzpah* on our part to stand before God begging for life, while wearing something that required us to take another creature's life! In our society, we are perhaps somewhat removed from the act of animal killing for our meat and leather goods, but in ancient days, in a more agrarian society, people would have been much more aware that animals were raised and slaughtered for the products that we consume.

So, this year, when you come to shul on Yom Kippur, wear white, and sneakers or artificial leather shoes. Besides the fact that it is most appropriate to wear these non-leather shoes, in many cases, they are much more comfortable on our feet than dress shoes (and I am sure, high heels!). Since we know we will be standing for much of the day, our “soles” will thank us, just as our “souls” are spiritually being uplifted by the High Holiday experience.

WEARING A KITTEL ON THE HIGH HOLY DAYS

“The Whole Kittel & Caboodle”

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With summer drawing to an end, you have probably begun to think about your fall wardrobe. Whether you are planning for the kids to go back to school, looking at your business clothes for work or thinking about the annual pilgrimage to warmer climates, among the items you will likely seek are outfits for the High Holy Days.

American Jewish folklore is filled with remembrances of High Holy Day fashion. Some of it celebrates the special feeling of reflecting the new start of the year with a new outfit. Some of it satirizes the excesses which can stand in contrast to the message of the season. I would like to suggest a different approach to dressing for these special days, especially for Yom Kippur.

The kittel is a simple white garment, similar to a robe or an oversized shirt. In traditional circles it is worn by the groom on his wedding day, by the leader of the seder on Pesach and by the chazzan when chanting the prayers for rain and dew in the fall and spring. In the case of the groom, he presents himself to the bride untainted by devotion to anyone else. It represents the aspiration to purity of intention and devotion. In the case of the leader of the seder, the garment symbolizes the unblemished offering of the paschal lamb by the priests, now ritualized by the order of the meal. In the case of the prayers for water, the kittel expresses the hopes that God will provide rain or dew on the merits of a single people.

[At our shul the Hazzan] and I wear a kittel for the High Holy Days. As the facilitators of congregational worship, our clothes represent the clean slate to which we all aspire, as well as the attributes mentioned above. The simplicity of the kittel is also meant to remove a source of distraction from us and from you. But wearing a kittel is not limited to the functionaries of the service. Indeed, the tradition is open to everyone. I would like to encourage you to follow the custom this year and in years to come.

Imagine looking across the congregation and seeing a sea of white representing our desire to be purged of our sins. Imagine the true equality of each collection of prayers and meditations represented by the simple uniformity of garb. And imagine the ability to focus more directly on prayer and repentance without the distraction of concern about personal appearance. ...

If you choose, as most will, to wear our usual Western clothing, please consider dressing in white or light-colored clothes for Yom Kippur...

I would be remiss if I didn't note that the kittel resembles the tachrihin (shrouds) used to clothe the dead. Our willingness to present ourselves as being in God's hands is a statement of faith that we will be restored to life by repentance, prayer and tzedakah.

Meditation before Yom Kippur for One Who Cannot Fast

Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub, LMSW © 2005/5765

Ribbono shel Olam / Master of the Universe; Creator of All, Source of All Life,
Who Knows What is Deep in Human Hearts, Who Nurtures Every Living Being:

As You know, dear God,
Yom Kippur is fast approaching, and because of my condition,
I am not able to keep the traditional fast – I cannot abstain totally from eating.

On this Day of Atonement, this Sabbath of Sabbaths, this year and every year,
it is so central to join the people of Israel
in denying ourselves food and drink for one day
so that we focus on correcting our misdeeds,
on knowing our mortality;
on reaching for a life of Torah, *mitzvot*, and lovingkindness;
on You.

You know, dear God, that it is not my intent
to be apart from our people and our tradition.
My current state of health makes it unsuitable for me to fast

So, dear God, I turn to You now in sincerity and openness:
Help me in the coming year to do my best in guarding my health.
Help us, Your children, learn how to protect our bodies from harm.
Help us support others in caring for their *tzelem Elokim*, their Image of God.
Teach us to help one another grow and thrive in Body, Mind, and Spirit.

Guide caring family and health care professionals in their partnering with you
to bring healing if not cure, support and strength if not an end to symptoms.

And if there is an opportunity for me to help others who suffer
by doing something they need or by being attentive company – Grant me the ability to do this
mitzvah with love and devotion.

Rofeh khol basar / Healer of all living creatures:
I thank You for the breath that is in me, for the community of Israel that lives
for the possibilities of today and tomorrow.

May my eating be as a fast;
May it be dedicated to You, to *T'shuvah* –
to the Renewal and Restoration of my Relationship
to You, to Others, and to Myself.

YOM KIPPUR AND THE TRADITION OF REMEMBERING SOULS ON THE OTHER SIDE

By Rabbi Simcha Raphael

On Yom Kippur, it is traditional to recite Yizkor prayers in memory of deceased loved ones. The Yizkor candle is lit at home Erev Yom Kippur prior to leaving for Kol Nidre and Yizkor prayers are recited in synagogue the next day. It makes sense at this time of the year that we remember the lives of deceased parents and relatives, with whom we celebrated High Holy Days over many years. An inherent wisdom of Judaism is that four times throughout the year – in the sombre mode of Yom Kippur, and in the last days of celebration of Sukkot, Pesach and Shavuot – we reflect upon the lives of those who have died, honor their memory and attune to their souls in the world beyond.

As a bereavement counselor, I encourage people to talk about deceased loved ones at Yizkor, and feel the bittersweet memories of their loss. I learned at a very young age that talking openly about grief and about those who died can be very healing for families.

My mother was 10 years old when her father was killed tragically in a car accident. Overnight, my maternal grandmother, 33 at the time, became a bereaved widow with three young children, my mother being the oldest. I can only imagine what this trauma was like for her family in 1933, long before “single moms” and widow-to-widow support groups were a normative dimension of society.

As I was growing up, my mother frequently spoke of her father. With both cherished recollection and bittersweet feelings, she would share memories of the father she knew as a young girl, and what family life was like after his death. He was gone but his life and the impact of his death were never forgotten.

Twenty-two years later, in 1955, my mother lost her mother as well. I knew this grandmother; she was very dear to me as a young child. I recall missing her very much, but feeling a sense of her presence for many years after her death. And, just like with her father, my mother spoke frequently of her mother. Remembering her mother’s life and the wisdom she imparted, and at the same time grieving her loss, were intricately interwoven.

My philosophy of death and grief was learned by osmosis from my mother. As a young child, I knew death was simply part of life. We spoke openly of the dead and remembered their lives and legacy. Death was not denied, nor was it glorified. Death was painful but real. And in remembering the dead, in a loving not morbid sense, I learned that the connection between the living and the dead continues long after physical death.

In our culture, there is often a deep discomfort with the topic of death, an almost compulsive attempt to avoid talking about it, as if completely staying away from the topic will prevent the inevitable destiny of every human being.

However, having spent three decades teaching and writing about Jewish approaches to death and afterlife, I discovered for myself, and others, that Judaism provides very effective ways of mourning and remembering the dead. Healthy bereavement can be accomplished by honoring the grief one goes through; by making use of traditional Jewish death practices; and by staying open to the ever-changing mystery of the interconnection between the world of the living and the world of the dead.

There is a mistaken belief in modern Jewish life that Judaism does not uphold a belief in the afterlife. This is not the case. In the pre-modern world of Isaac Bashevis Singer and the Chasidic masters, there is never any question about survival of the soul after death. In fact, throughout the history of Judaism, there has been a sense of belief in afterlife. Even the historical Jewish understanding of both the Yizkor prayers and the Kaddish prayer is that they are efficacious ways of attuning to the soul of the deceased.

So throughout the day on Yom Kippur this year, remember that in addition to lighting a candle and saying the traditional prayer, Yizkor offers a perfect opportunity to remember the deceased, to share those memories with family members and to honor one's own feelings of grief. It is also a time for attuning to the soul and spirit of the person who has died, and the legacy he or she has left behind.

As the Yizkor candle burns for 24 hours, the whole day lends itself to having meaningful family conversations about life's finality, loss and grief, and questions about afterlife and the world beyond. Through these conversations, we are given the opportunity to live life more fully, more open to the inevitability of change and transition inherent to life itself.

I am ever-grateful to my mother for how she modeled a healthy and spiritually informed attitude toward grief and loss. I will be remembering her and my father this year at Yizkor, and remembering how they both taught me that, ultimately, there are no final answers to the mystery of life and death.

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Note: This commentary is adapted from Rabbi Raphael's April 1, 2015 article in the Philadelphia Jewish Exponent. This article was downloaded from a Facebook post by Rabbi Richard Address on behalf of the Jewish Sacred Aging Project, on Sept. 16, 2015. For more about this project, visit www.jewishsacredaging.com

When Yom Kippur Prayers Don't Help Grieving

by Judy Bolton-Fasman

My father was buried on the eve of Rosh Hashanah 2002 and the holiday began just a few surreal hours after I stood at his open grave. The shiva — the seven-day period of formal mourning — was cancelled to usher in the New Year. With a truncated shiva behind me, I debuted as a congregational mourner on Rosh Hashanah. It was the first time that I said the Mourner's Kaddish. Arguably, the busiest day of the year in the synagogue, I stood up in front of 800 people to recite the Kaddish — effectively a love song to God whom I felt didn't deserve my adoration.

The feminist, poet and liturgist Marcia Falk had a similar experience. In 1978, her father Abraham Abbey Falk died midway between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and her grieving was cut short by the advent of the Day of Atonement. After three days of shiva, Falk braced herself to mourn in a crowded synagogue. But the public face she tried to show faded away when she was confronted with the somber, terrifying words of the Un'taneh Tokef. The thousand year-old prayer, written by an unknown author in northern Europe, is central to the Yom Kippur liturgy.

In a recent presentation at Brandeis University sponsored by the Hadassah-Brandeis Institute, Falk noted that her ambivalent relationship with the Un'taneh Tokef was the inspiration for her latest book, *The Days Between: Blessings, Poems, and Directions of the Heart for the Jewish High Holiday Season*. "The Un'taneh Tokef" she said, "is a listing, a repentance. The message it conveyed to me, five days after losing my father, was that if he had been a pious, righteous and repentant man the decree would have been averted and he would not be dead. No one actually believed that, but nonetheless the words were hurtful and unhelpful."

Falk described the experience of hearing the traditional Un'taneh Tokef as one that left her feeling "hollow" and then angry. I remember feeling similarly distressed that the Yom Kippur liturgy did not address my grief. For Falk, though, it led her to her life's work as a composer of a new Hebrew liturgy — a liturgy expressed in a gender-free, non-hierarchical language. In prose and poetry and prayer, Falk jettisoned the image of God as father, king and ruler and brought a more inclusive voice to wide attention in her opus *The Book of Blessings: A New Prayer Book for the Weekdays, the Sabbath and the New Moon*.

The Days Between, however, focuses on the ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur traditionally known as the Yamim Noraim— the Days of Awe. Falk calls these days by a gentler name: the Aseret Y'mey T'shuvah, the Ten Days of Turning, or Returning. In keeping with that welcoming spirit, there is no image of God as a judge or executioner in these pages. God is a spirit, a force, a benevolent presence in the world. In her rendition of the Un'taneh Tokef, Falk reflects her belief that "our mortality is the core of a spiritual life." Her interpretation of the prayer begins: "Our lives are

stories/inscribed in time./At the turning of the year/we look back, look ahead, see/that we are always/in the days between.” I was most affected by Falk’s rendering of Yizkor, the service of remembrance. She transforms Yizkor from a communal, one-size-fits-all liturgy into something more personal and meaningful by renaming it Ezkor, “I recall.”

The traditional liturgy asks God to remember the souls of our dead, but Falk recasts the service as a personal journey in which recollections of our dead are individuated. “I Recall,” writes Falk, “offers a way to mourn while acknowledging the fullness of one’s experience.”

There are parallels between traditional liturgy and Falk’s prayerful renditions. For example, in Falk’s Ezkor service, her poem “Beneath the Shekhinah’s Wings” corresponds with Psalm 23. The phrase *tahat kan’fey hash’khinah* (beneath the Shekhinah’s wings) is from *El Maley Rahamim*, God of Compassion, the hymn customarily recited at funerals.

As I read through Falk’s prose poems and “re-visionings” of the High Holiday prayers, I realized that she has written a *machzor*, a High Holiday prayer book, for the 21st century that is nothing short of revolutionary. This *machzor* begins with the beautiful, simple idea of exalting the world around us rather than limiting ourselves to the traditional extolling of God’s name as we do in the Mourner’s Kaddish. In “The Days Between” Falk encourages us to confront our mortality while delving into the richness with which we commemorate our humanity.

A traditional translation of the Un’taneh Tokef

On Rosh Hashanah it is written, and on Yom Kippur it is sealed.
How many will pass and how many will be created?
Who will live and who will die?
Who in their time, and who not their time?
Who by fire and who by water?
Who by sword and who by beast?
Who by hunger and who by thirst?
Who by earthquake and who by drowning?
Who by strangling and who by stoning?
Who will rest and who will wander?
Who will be safe and who will be torn?
Who will be calm and who will be tormented?
Who will become poor and who will get rich?
Who will be made humble and who will be raised up?
But teshuvah and tefillah and tzedakah (return and prayer and righteous acts)
deflect the evil of the decree.

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