

Reflections on Yom Kippur

(collected and edited by Alon Gildoni 5768)

Numbers 29:7

ז ובעשור לחדש השביעי הזה, מקרא-קדש יהיה לכם, וענייתם, את-נפשותיכם; כל-מלאכה, לא תעשו.

7 And on the tenth day of this seventh monthⁱ ye shall have a holy convocation; and ye shall afflict your soulsⁱⁱ; ye shall do no manner of work

Leviticus 16:29-34

כט ויהיה לכם, לקחת עולם: בחדש השביעי בעשור לחדש תענו את-נפשותיכם, וכל-מלאכה לא תעשו--האזרח, והגר הגר בתוכם.

29 And it shall be a statute for ever unto you: in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, ye shall afflict your souls, and shall do no manner of work, the home-born, or the stranger that sojourneth among you.

ל כי-ביום הזה יכפר עליכם, לטהר אתכם: מכל חטאתיכם, לפני יהוה, תטהרו.

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

לא שבת שבתו היא לכם, וענייתם את-נפשותיכם--לקחת, עולם.

31 It is a sabbath of solemn rest unto you, and ye shall afflict your souls; it is a statute for ever.

Leviticus 23:23-31

כג ונדבר יהוה, אל-משה לאמר.

23 And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying:

כד דבר אל-בני ישראל, לאמר: בחדש השביעי באחד לחדש, יהיה לכם שבתון--זכרון תרועה, מקרא-קדש.

24 Speak unto the children of Israel, saying: In the seventh month, in the first day of the month, shall be a solemn rest unto you, a memorial proclaimed with the blast of horns, a holy convocation.

כה כל-מלאכת עבדה, לא תעשו; והקרבתם אשה, ליהוה. {ס}

25 Ye shall do no manner of servile workⁱⁱⁱ; and ye shall bring an offering unto the LORD. {S}

כו ונדבר יהוה, אל-משה לאמר.

26 And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying:

כז אך בעשור לחדש השביעי הזה יום הכפרים הוא, מקרא-קדש יהיה לכם, וענייתם, את-נפשותיכם; והקרבתם אשה, ליהוה.

27 Howbeit on the tenth day of this seventh month is the day of atonement; there shall be a holy convocation unto you, and ye shall afflict your souls; and ye shall bring an offering made by fire unto the LORD.

כח וכל-מלאכה לא תעשו, בעצם היום הזה: כי יום כפרים, הוא, לכפר עליכם, לפני יהוה אלהיכם.

28 And ye shall do no manner of work in that same day; for it is a day of atonement^{iv}, to make atonement for you before the LORD your God.

כט כי כל-הנפש אשר לא-תענה, בעצם היום הזה--ונקרתה, מעמיה.

29 For whatsoever soul it be that shall not be afflicted in that same day, he shall be cut off from his people.

ל וכל-הנפש, אשר תעשה כל-מלאכה, בעצם היום הזה--והאבדתי את-הנפש ההוא, מקרב עמי.

30 And whatsoever soul it be that doeth any manner of work in that same day, that soul will I destroy from among his people.

לא כל-מלאכה, לא תעשו: לקחת עולם לדורתיכם, בכל משבתיכם.

31 Ye shall do no manner of work; it is a statute for ever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.

לב שבת שבתו הוא לכם, וענייתם את-נפשותיכם; בתשעה לחדש, בערב--מערב עד-ערב, תשבתו שבתכם. {פ}

32 It shall be unto you a sabbath of complete rest, and ye shall afflict your souls; in the ninth day of the month at even, from even unto even, shall ye keep your sabbath. {P}

Isaiah 58:6-8

ו הלוֹא זֶה, צוֹם אֲבִיחֲרֵהוּ--פִתַּח
חֲרָצוֹת רָשָׁע, הַתֵּר אֲגָדוֹת מוֹטָה;
וְשִׁלַּח רְצוּצִים חֲפָזִים, וְכָל-מוֹטָה
תִּנְתְּקוּ.

6 Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the fetters of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?

ז הלוֹא פָרַס לְרֵעֵב לֶחֶמְךָ, וְעֲנִיִּים
מֵרֹדִים תְּבִיא בַּיִת: כִּי-תִרְאֶה עָרֹם
וְכִסְיֹתוֹ, וּמִבְשָׁרְךָ לֹא תִתְעַלֵּם.

7 Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast **out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?**^v

ח אִי יִבְקַע פֶּשַׁח אִוְרְךָ, וְאֲרָכְתָּ
מִהֲרָה תִצְמַח; וְהֵלֵךְ לְפָנֶיךָ צְדָקָתְךָ, כְּבוֹד
יְהוָה יֵאָסֵף.

8 Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thy healing shall spring forth speedily; and thy righteousness shall go before thee, the glory of the LORD shall be thy rearward.

357 ADDITIONAL SERVICE—YOM KIPPUR

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U'neTaNe Tokef

Reader

May our sanctification of Thy name ascend unto Thee; for Thou art our God and a King of pardon and forgiveness.

Congregation

We will observe the mighty holiness of this day, for it is one of awe and anxiety. Thereon is Thy dominion exalted. On this day we conceive Thee established on Thy throne of mercy, sitting thereon in truth. We behold Thee, as Judge and Witness, recording our secret thoughts and acts and setting the seal thereon. Thou recordest everything; yea, Thou rememberest the things forgotten. Thou unfoldest the records, and the deeds therein inscribed tell their own story for lo, the seal of every man's hand is set thereto.

The great Shofar is sounded, and a still small voice is heard. The angels in heaven are dismayed and are seized with fear and trembling, as they proclaim: "Behold the Day of Judgment!" The hosts of heaven are to be arraigned in judgment for in Thine eyes even they are not free from guilt. All who enter the world dost Thou cause to pass before Thee, one by one, as a flock of sheep. As a shepherd musters his sheep and causes them to pass beneath his staff, so dost Thou pass and record, count and visit, every living soul, appointing the measure of every creature's life and decreeing its destiny.

On New Year's Day the decree is inscribed and on the Day of Atonement it is sealed, how many shall pass away and how many shall be born; who shall live and who shall die; who shall attain the measure of man's days and who shall not attain it; who shall perish 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 plague; who by strangling and who by stoning; who shall have rest and who shall go wandering; who shall be tranquil and who shall be disturbed; who shall be at ease and who shall be afflicted; who shall become poor and who shall wax rich; who shall be brought low and who shall be exalted.

BUT REPENTANCE, PRAYER AND RIGHTEOUSNESS
AVERT THE SEVERE DECREE.

For according to Thy name so is Thy praise. Thou art slow to anger and ready to forgive. Thou desirest not the death of the sinner but that he return from his evil way and live. Even until his dying day Thou waitest for him, perchance he will repent and Thou wilt straightway receive him.

Verily, Thou as Creator knowest the nature of man, for he is but flesh and blood. Man's origin is dust and he returns to the dust. He obtains his bread by the peril of his life; he is like a fragile potsherd, as the grass that withers, as the flower that fades, as a fleeting shadow, as a passing cloud, as the wind that blows, as the floating dust, yea, and as a dream that vanishes.

BUT THOU ART EVER OUR LIVING GOD AND KING.

Kol Nidrei^{vi}

Before sunset on the eve of Yom Kippur ("Day of Atonement"), the congregation gathers in the synagogue. The Ark is opened and two people take from it two Torah scrolls. Then they take their places, one on each side of the cantor, and the three recite:

In the tribunal of Heaven and the tribunal of earth, by the permission of God - praised be He - and by the permission of this holy congregation, we hold it lawful to pray with transgressors."

The cantor then chants the prayer beginning with the words Kol Nidre with its touching melody, and, gradually increasing in volume from pianissimo (quiet) to fortissimo (loud), repeats three times the following words:

All personal vows we are likely to make, all personal oaths and pledges we are likely to take between this Yom Kippur and the next Yom Kippur, we publicly renounce. Let them all be relinquished and abandoned, null and void, neither firm nor established. Let our personal vows, pledges and oaths be considered neither vows nor pledges nor oaths.

The leader and the congregation then say together three times "May all the people of Israel be forgiven, including all the strangers who live in their midst, for all the people are in fault." The Torah scrolls are then replaced, and the customary evening service begins.

Why Seventh Month?

The name "Rosh Hashana" literally means "Beginning of the Year" You may wonder how this can be, since it is called the first day of the seventh month! The reason is that the Jewish calendar is built on two cycles-the religious (Spiritual) calendar beginning in the Spring, and the civil (Agricultural) calendar beginning in the Fall. In the Torah, the months are never named but only numbered, beginning with the month of Nisan in the early Spring, which is the first month according to the religious calendar.

The Five Prohibitions of Yom Kippur

On Yom Kippur, every Jew becomes like an angel. As the Maharal of Prague explains: "All of the mitzvot that God commanded us on [Yom Kippur] are designed to remove, as much as possible, a person's relationship to physicality, until he is completely like an angel."

Just as angels (so to speak) stand upright, so too we spend most of Yom Kippur standing in the synagogue. And just as angels (so to speak) wear white, so too we are accustomed to wear white on Yom Kippur. Just as angels do not eat or drink, so too, we do not eat or drink.

There are five areas of physical involvement which we remove ourselves from on Yom Kippur. This is, according to the Oral Law, the meaning of afflicting ones soul: The five prohibitions symbolize:

- a. our five senses in which we have committed sins;
- b. the five books of Moses (so we'll be worthy to receive each one of them and the commandments written in them)
- c. The five times where it says NEFESH (soul) in Yom Kippurs Torah portion.
- d. The five prayers of the day: ARVIT (Evening prayer), SHACHARIT (Morning prayer), MUSAF (Additional Morning prayer), MINCHA (Afternoon Prayer Service), NE'EE'LA (Closing Prayer)

Step One Refrain from all food and drink from 30 minutes before sundown until after nightfall the next day. This usually follows a feast, known as Seudah Mafseket (last meal), where rice, fish and poultry are consumed (but no meat). While all healthy adults are required to fast during Yom Kippur, children and adults whose health might be jeopardized from fasting are not required to participate. 2

Step Two Do not wear leather shoes during Yom Kippur. This is based upon the ancient practice of removing one's shoes before entering the temple. In addition, leather shoes are perceived to be comfortable, and one should forgo as many comforts as possible on the Day of Atonement. 3

Step Three Follow the third prohibition and do not bathe or wash during Yom Kippur. To prepare for Yom Kippur, a mikvah, or ritual bath, must be taken on the previous day. This is done to emulate the behavior of the angels in heaven, who do not eat, drink or bathe. Also, washing may be perceived as an attempt to cleanse the outside of the body, distracting from the inner cleansing needed during atonement.

Step Four Do not anoint yourself with oil during Yom Kippur. The more modern translation of this requires that you do not wear perfume, makeup or jewelry during the Day of Atonement. This is done to avoid reminding God of the Sin of the Golden Calf, where the Children of Israel worshipped an idol they had created while Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments. 5

Step Five Finish following the five prohibitions of Yom Kippur by not engaging in marital relations. Sexual intercourse is deemed to distract the mind from focusing on spiritual matters to more earthly concerns. Throughout the year, many people spend their days focusing on food, work, superficial material possessions (symbolized by shoes) and superficial pleasures (symbolized by anointing). On Yom Kippur, we restore our priorities to what really counts in life.

Working on the Shabbat – 39 Avot Melacha

The tractate of Shabbat the Mishna (the first written recording of the Oral Torah of the Jewish people) lists 39 tasks which, according to the Torah are considered to be "Work". These are the tasks one is forbidden to do on Shabbat, and are based on the actions necessary for the erection of the Mishkan (The Tabernacle), and its contents.

AVOT MELACHA

The 39 categories of work which were performed in and for the Mishkan are called the AVOT MELACHA, the fathers or primary categories, since they are the foundation, the original source for all secondary types of Melacha which are similar and derived from them. These similar types of work are called Toladot, descendants, just like parents and children. But from aspect of their being forbidden, there is no difference between an Av or its Tolada, for both are equally forbidden by the Torah. In sum:

Av Melacha

is an act which was done in the construction of the Mishkan.

Tolada

is an act which resembles an Av in its nature and end product.

For example, Planting is an Av Melacha, but watering is a Tolada because it encourages the growth of the plant.

The 39 categories of activity prohibited on Shabbat can be divided into four groups.

- **The first 11 categories are activities required to bake bread (סידורא דפת).**
1 Planting 2 Plowing 3 Reaping 4 Binding sheaves 5 Threshing 6 Winnowing 7 Selecting
8 Grinding 9 Sifting 10 Kneading 11 Baking
- **The next 13 categories are activities required to make a garment (דבגד סידורא).**
12 Shearing wool 13 Washing wool 14 Beating wool 15 Dyeing 16 Spinning 17 Weaving
18 Making two loops 19 Weaving at least two threads 20 Separating two threads
21 Tying 22 Untying 23 Sewing at least two stitches 24 Tearing for the purpose of sewing
- **The next 9 categories are activities required to make leather.**
25 Trapping 26 Slaughtering 27 Flaying 28 Salting meat 29 Curing hide 30 Scraping hide
31 Cutting hide into pieces 32 Writing two or more letters 33 Erasing
- **2 tasks linked with building.**
34 Building 35 Tearing something down
- **3 tasks linked with preparing a fire.**
36 Extinguishing a fire 37 Igniting a fire 38 Applying the finishing touch
- **1 prohibition is linked with removing items and carrying them from private to public property. 39**
Transferring between domains

At-onement - By Tzvi Freeman

The Yom Kippur *Machzor* (prayer book) translated into English resembles a graceful bird of flight, an albatross, clumsily waddling along the ground; a ballerina in an astronaut's suit -- on Jupiter; a romantic sonata performed by a jug band. All the more amazing, then, that there is one word -- a key word -- that the English language got right. Not just right, but exquisitely right. One could say, even better than the original. And that is "atonement". For this is certainly what Yom Kippur is about in its very essence: A day of "at one-ment."

How did this language know? Our sages had picked up on it long ago, that the Torah speaks about Yom Kippur as a day "once in the year". Of course, that could simply mean it is a unique day, distinct from every other day in

all regards. But in a deeper sense, at the core of Yom Kippur lies a theme of "onement" and our act of being there -- at that onement.

Yes, you'll tell me, I've got it all wrong. "Atonement" is simply the translation of the Hebrew *Kapparah* -- any act that effects forgiveness, cleanses our soul of the stains it has acquired over the year and allows us and G-d to make up and get on with things. What has that got to do with "oneness" or "onement"?

Everything. First of all, because atonement achieves at-onement. When the inner soul of man below and the Essence of Being above forgive and make up, they are at one once again.

And because at-onement achieves atonement. Because, in order to achieve atonement we must first arrive at onement.

But the rest of the year we are not at onement. Why? Because of the way we see things.

Looks are deceiving. With our fleshly eyes we see ourselves as aliens in a universe harshly cold and silent to the drama of emotions and desires, agony and ecstasy, aspirations, failures and achievements that make us human beings.

But a deeper sense tells us that, no, deep within this reality and entirely transcendent of it is an essence that resonates with the stirring of our inner hearts. For do not we also emerge out of this universe? If we have a heart, a mind, a soul, must not the universe also have such? "The One who formed the ear, does He not hear?"

We call that Essence, "G-d." And so, we pray.

All year round we live apart from this Essence. Yes, we have a conscience driving us not to fall out of harmony with it in a sort of *pas de deux*. But it is a harmony of "should": We would rather do "this," but that other voice says we should do "that." So we do. But sometimes we don't. At least, not exactly as we "should." We fall out of sync. Like two musical notes not quite in tune, a dissonance ensues. We fall further apart. Our backs are turned to each other. There is no dance, no duet, only the friction of two disparate travelers acting out their own scripts.

But on Yom Kippur we embrace, our essence with that Essence Within and Beyond. And we say to one another, "The dance may be faulty, but the hearts are one." There is no longer "should". There is "is". All is forgiven. At onement.

v

Repentance, Prayer and Charity

It is customary to give charity generously and liberally during all the days of repentance, but on the day before Yom Kippur this is even more the case, for tzedakah is a great source of merit and serves as protection against harsh decrees.

Teshuvah, tefillah and tzedakah, commonly translated as repentance, prayer and charity, (See on U'neTaNe Tokef prayer Page 2) are concepts much more profound than their translations suggest.

Teshuvah -"Repentance" means regret and contrition for sins or omissions of good deeds; and the resolve to start afresh. Many phrases in English literature [and in the literature of other languages] sound this theme of repentance: "To turn over a new leaf," "to become a new man."

"Teshuvah" means something very different. It emphasizes not the idea of "newness," but of return. A Jew is intrinsically good and wants to do good; sin is completely antithetical to his nature. If he does transgress, the transgression does not impugn his essential self but is a foreign thing that has adhered to him.

Teshuvah, then, is the return to that essential, real self of a Jew. While a person is a composite of body and soul, in a Jew the soul is primary and the body secondary; and that soul is no less than "a part of G-d above." Teshuvah is therefore the reforging of the essential union between the soul and its source, a union which was temporarily in abeyance through sin. In other words, a Jew, through teshuvah, reveals his true self and reasserts the soul's mastery over the body.

This is why teshuvah is relevant to all Jews, even the completely righteous. Teshuvah is not just "repentance," the desire to atone for wrongdoing and start afresh, which would not apply to the completely righteous who do no wrong. Instead, the Alter Rebbe writes,[7] teshuvah is the concept of "the spirit shall return to the G-d who gave it"[8]: the soul continually strives to come closer to G-d, its source. And just as G-d is infinite, so, even the completely righteous Jew, can rise ever higher in his apprehension of G-dliness. He, too, is always doing teshuvah - returning to his source. Teshuvah is relevant also to the completely wicked. No matter how low he has fallen, hope is never lost. He can always do teshuvah for he need not perform any revolutionary act, create a new existence. He need merely return to his inner self.

Tefillah "Prayer" is the idea of supplication, petition; one entreats G-d to grant one's requests. If nothing is lacking, or there is no desire for anything, there is no "prayer."

"Tefillah," on the other hand, means union with G-d. In contrast to "prayer," with its emphasis on G-d fulfilling one's request, tefillah stresses man's striving to achieve union with G-d.

This is of relevance to all. Every Jew possesses a soul connected to and having its source in G-d. But a soul in heaven is very different from a soul in a body on this world. The physical concerns of the body - eating, drinking, etc. - affect and weaken the soul's bond with G-d. The times of tefillah are the means by which this bond is reforged and reinforced. They are times of complete communion with G-d.

Thus, unlike "prayer," tefillah is fully relevant even to those who are not in any need. Tefillah is not only the requesting for one's needs (although this is certainly a part of tefillah), but principally the instrument whereby a Jew and his Maker are joined.

Tzedakah "Charity" commonly means alms, gratuitous benefactions for the poor.[12] The giver of charity is a benevolent person, giving when he need not. He does not owe the poor anything, but gives because of his generosity. "Tzedakah" has a completely opposite meaning. Instead of connoting benevolence, it is the idea of justice- that it is only right and just that one gives tzedakah. There are two reasons for this:

A person is obligated to give to another, for the money is not his own. G-d has given the money to him on trust, for the purpose of giving it to others. G-d is not beholden to man, yet gives him what he needs. A Jew must act in the same way, indeed is obligated to: he must give to others although not beholden to them. In return, G-d rewards him in like manner. Because he has transcended his natural instinct and given when not beholden, G-d in turn grants him more than he is otherwise worthy of receiving.

The true Jewish meaning of teshuvah, tefillah and tzedakah, then, is a Jew returning to his true self - teshuvah; a Jew achieving union with G-d - tefillah; and a Jew acting justly - tzedakah. When Jews perform these services in the Ten Days of Repentance, then, notwithstanding the good granted on Rosh HaShanah, G-d gives yet more on Yom Kippur.

Kol Nidrei - Labels are for Suits By Shalom Paltiel

Did you ever take a close look at Kol Nidrei, widely considered the most important prayer of Judaism? Read the translation and you might be quite puzzled as to why such a big deal is made out of this particular piece of liturgy. It is a simple--albeit strong--statement of annulling vows. Is that the foremost thought on our minds as we enter the synagogue on the eve of the holiest day of the year?

Two Jews on an Airplane After completing his morning prayers aboard the El Al flight en route to Tel Aviv, the elderly European Chassid turned to the American Jew sitting next to him and offered the use of his prayer shawl and tefillin. The problem was that a strong language barrier separated the two. The Chassid spoke only Yiddish and Russian, while our modern Jew was only able to converse in English. Even sign language didn't help facilitate communication between these two very different individuals. Finally, in frustration the Chassid blurted out the following--probably the extent of his English vocabulary: "I Jew--you Jew; I tefillin--you tefillin." There was no need to say another word. The man understood. Sure he'd put on tefillin aboard his first flight to Israel.

I love this story because it speaks volumes about the common Jewish spark that each of us possess, regardless of who we are and the extent of our Jewish observance. These two Jews had very little in common; they stemmed from different parts of the world, and didn't even share a common language. Yet, when it came to the Jew within, they connected seamlessly; they were one and the same. Suddenly they understood each other perfectly. In truth, there was no barrier at all. Because after all--"I Jew, You Jew." Another one of my favorites is the story of the poor, jobless man who came to the circus looking for work. The only available position was to fill in for a missing tiger. They gave him a tiger's costume and put him in the cage. All was well until Mr. Lion began strolling in his direction. Petrified, the tiger said what a Jew says when faced with imminent death: Shma Yisrael Ado-noi Elo-henu Ado-noi Echad ("Hear O Israel, G-d is our G-d, G-d is one"). To which the lion answered: Baruch shem kevod malchuto leolam va'ed ("Blessed be the name of the glory of His kingdom forever and ever"--the second verse of the Shema).

That's the story of the Jews: On the surface we might look very different from one another. Underneath, we're all the same.

Brand Name Judaism

The problem is the labels. Every Jew has a label!

Orthodox. Conservative. Reform. Reconstructionist. Modern. Traditional. Secular. Religious. The list goes on. Where did all these labels come from? Do you think for a moment that Moses organized the people of Israel around Mt Sinai in accordance with their denominational affiliations? Of course not. These labels are not rooted anywhere in Torah or classical Jewish literature. They are recent inventions that serve absolutely no purpose other than to divide our people. And this, at a time when we need each other more than ever. I think all agree more unity is what we need. As for division amongst our people, we've got plenty of that...

When it comes to clothing I'd be the first to agree: labels serve an important purpose in helping us choose our preferred selections in terms of style, quality, etc. But who ever heard of labels for Jews?

Think about it. What use are these labels to the Jewish people other than to create partitions along denominational lines? Why can't we all just be "Jewish"? Why the need to label ourselves based on our level of observance?

It's true some of us are more religiously observant than others. Is that reason to categorically divide us into splintering groups? Let us each observe Judaism and its precepts to the best of our knowledge and ability, without the need of a name tag proclaiming ourselves a particular brand.

In addition to dividing us, the labels also limit our growth as Jews. Once we've been labeled, we no longer feel the need to learn more about our heritage than is typical for members of our particular group. Remove the label, and Judaism is yours to explore, completely and freely, without fear you might cross the line and observe some tradition that's not for your type. See my point?

If I'm not Religious--Am I a Bad Jew?

Perhaps we subconsciously use labels to lower the bar so we can still feel good about ourselves as Jews even if we're not growing Jewishly. The truth is there's no need for that accommodation. G-d loves us just the same--even if we're not "perfect" Jews.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe would always emphasize the value of performing even one single mitzvah (Jewish observance). He repeatedly proclaimed that Judaism is not an all-or-nothing religion as some might have you think ("Either observe all of Torah or don't bother with any of it 'cause you're a 'bad' Jew anyway"). This would be the case if G-d were a tyrannical dictator whom we needed to placate. In truth, G-d is a loving father. He asked us to fulfill the mitzvahs, not in quest of power or control, but out of His deep love for each of us--His precious children. With children, it's not perfection you look for. A good parent wants each child to reach their best potential. It's not "all-or-nothing." It's "do-your-best!"

A man from the Lubavitch community in Brooklyn once complained to the Rebbe about one of his children who had "left the path" of Torah observance. "I raised all of my children exactly the same way. I can't understand why this one veered away." Replied the Rebbe: "Therein lies the problem. You raised all of your children the same way. But they're not the same. Each child is unique and requires direction and guidance in accordance with his or her individual personality."

G-d is a loving, wise parent who has a personal and unique relationship with each of us. Sure, He'd like us all to "reach for the stars" and try to observe Judaism fully in all of its beauty and depth. But that's for long term. For right now what is most important to G-d is that we do our best and continue to grow. If we observe one more mitzvah this year than we did last year--we are making G-d proud!

Annuling the Labels

So why the whole fuss around Kol Nidrei? On a deeper, mystical level it is much more than just the annulment of vows and promises. It is a powerful declaration of annulling and invalidating any and all labels, restrictions, demarcations, shackles, barriers and name tags that tend to obscure our sparkling inherent Jewish essence. All of us share one single designer label: JEW! We are one very special, indivisible people; the family of G-d's chosen nation. Sure, like any good family we have our share of sibling rivalry. But that doesn't change the fact that "I Jew--You Jew."