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## Yom Kippur Drashos 5768

### Kol Nidrei

**I**t is safe to assume, that across the Jewish world – Orthodox and otherwise – at this very moment, thousands, perhaps millions, are perturbed by one question. And, at this very moment, hundreds, if not thousands of Rabbonim Chashuvim are pontificating and/or expounding this quandary in search of a possible solution. It is a simple question really;

Why Kol Nidrei?

Up until this point everything was perfect; Rosh Hashana, Shofar, Unesana Tokef, Aseras Yimei Teshuva, asking friends for their forgiveness etc, these all seem appropriate and timely for the Days they speak to.

Kol Nidrei, as *the introduction*, and to some the only moment of observance today, is understandably a major juggernaut to our intellect and religious curiosity.

Over the years we too have broached this peculiarity, suggesting that before the “Day of promises” to G-d and Kabolos for ourselves we need a heavy reminder of what they entail and how they are deemed viable at the highest level<sup>1</sup>.

But these answers only explain Kol Nidrei as a moment within a Day, an introduction necessary to commence and approach the Divine. We would, however, have to presume that Kol Nidrei also speaks to the *thrust* of the Day, its core and heart.

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**Y**esterday, I stumbled across an article online; a story that colleagues strongly suggested I not repeat from the pulpit feeling that it may cause some discomfort. My wife too joined this chorus of opposition, but for a different reason; she felt no one would believe the story to be true.

Well, the story can be found in the Daily Telegraph<sup>2</sup> out of the UK and I feel it serves a *necessary* illustration as well as teaches an integral fundamental that will give us a foundation in explicating our dilemma.

*A couple was having problems. They turn to clergy, family and friends –searching for someone to talk to - all to no avail. Days and weeks go by with them not only not talking to anyone but not even to each other.*

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<sup>1</sup> Although my own idea, I would have to assume that many have already supplied such an answer, for it seems evident.

<sup>2</sup> See. <http://www.news.com.au/dailytelegraph/story/0,22049,22439156-5012895,00.html>. Since I will be using minor poetic license to diminish any discomfort, I have pasted below the exact story as reported:

**Married couple who didn't realize they were chatting each other up on the internet are divorcing.**

*Sana Klaric and husband Adnan, who used the names "Sweetie" and "Prince of Joy" in an online chatroom, spent hours telling each other about their marriage troubles, Metro.co.uk reported.*

*The truth emerged when the two turned up for a date. Now the pair, from Zenica in central Bosnia, are divorcing after accusing each other of being unfaithful.*

*"I was suddenly in love. It was amazing. We seemed to be stuck in the same kind of miserable marriage. How right that turned out to be," Sana, 27, said.*

*Adnan, 32, said: "I still find it hard to believe that Sweetie, who wrote such wonderful things, is actually the same woman I married and who has not said a nice word to me for years".*

*Finally, the husband feels as if he will explode unless he unburdens himself, so, he takes his laptop to a quiet corner of the house in search of any one – man or woman – he could talk to online. After some time he indeed does find someone. Slowly their trust builds and by months end, after many open and frank conversations, he decides he must admit, not just his wife's imperfections, but his own as well. "You know, when I get really upset, חטאתי אני מזכיר היים, I call my wife by the following odd nicknames...." The internet friend replies, "That's strange, my husband calls me the same things". Long pause. Slowly the man walks out of his office and coming his way, holding another laptop, is his wife. They stare at each other in utter disbelief.*

**So often what we are looking for is right there in front of us the whole time.**

**W**hat is a Neder? We take an act or an item that is permissible or allowed and transform it into the forbidden.

We do this although we already have 613 commandments, a Code of Jewish Law, a Talmud and Tradition.

Even so, one may at times feel that "it's just not working" and that "it (normative Halacha) is not enough, I must go *outside the box* in order to kiss the Divine."

So, easily tempted, we fervently embrace Chumros and quirks while true Halachik and Torah values fall to the whey side<sup>3</sup>. *It is so easy to be Frummer yet so hard to just be Frum*<sup>4</sup>. Indeed, it is for this reason that a Nazir would need to bring a Korban Chatas.

<sup>3</sup> See Pischei Teshuva YD 18:9 that a Chumra should never intrude with our obligation of Oneg Shabbos. Although the concept of Chumros and Kabolos is well cosseted in Halachah, so are its possible dangers. See Shach 65:7 and 89:17.

My father once gave me a solid piece of advice; never speak longer then 8 minutes on Kol Nidrei night, people are full to the brim and sleepy. For this reason I had left out many points and anecdotes that would have unnecessarily lengthened this talk.

A short story that illustrates our point thus far: R' Moshe Feinstein was asked by a father if he may allow his daughter to go out with a boy with his same first name (this refrain comes from the Tzava of R' Yehuda Hachasid) and R' Moshe responded: if only Rabbeinu Yehudah HaChasid put the entire Shulchan Aruch into the Sefer Chasidim, then, no one would dare veer from it! (In fact R' Moshe himself has a son-in-law who shares his name.) Interestingly, an earlier version of this story is found by the Ba'al Shut Teshuva Meahava in his Olat HaChodesh and reported on the blog *seforimblog*: "R' Eleazer Fleckels (most well know for his Teshuvah m'Ahahva), in his Olat haChodesh (vol. 1 p.15) records that the Nodah beYehudah would respond when asked if there is a problem marrying someone if that will cause the future father-in-law and future son-in-law will share the same name (which the tzavah states is a problem) "before you ask me about following the tzavah of R. Yehudah haChasid ask me about the tzavah (or statement) of Chazal which decries marrying the daughter of a am ha'aretz!"

<sup>4</sup> Line heard from a dentist from Rochester while at a Bar-Mitzva (Malsmacher) in Cleveland some 13 years ago. It was an epiphany for this writer then. He in turn heard from a Rav who

Kol Nidrei is when we are forced to bypass all of our *self discovered* faith and focus on the tools we know are *right here*; Shabbos, Minyan, Talmud Torah. We are reminded that we need *not* always think outside the box to discover Yahadus, as well as ourselves, nor do we have to go outside our families for inspiration.

We come to Yom Kippur and we are told to refrain. Asceticism, although frowned upon the rest of the year, is embraced<sup>5</sup>. Like Purim (Yom KipPurim, as the Rabbis teach) we too dress up – as angels. We act as if we are above food and drink, that we have no need for fraternization or intimacy. By the day's end we feel it indeed worked – yet, *that*, perhaps, is the lesson; Yom Kippur was/is a placebo, and in reality the training wheels were off the whole time. It is in *us*, in our daily lives, within the Torah and its Dorchei Noam. We need *not* look elsewhere. Yom Kippur reminds us that, Lhavdil Ad LaNetzech, Superman does not need his cape to fly, and we do not need “extras” - Nedarim U'Shavouas - to discover ourselves. As the Kotzker Rebbe would say; the custom is not to eat nuts on Rosh Hashanah because the Gematria for nut-אגוז –is the same value as sin –חטא . Continued the Kotzker, what people forget on Rosh Hashanah is that חטא is also Gematria חטא! Is it so rare a description of a home that would not dare bring אגוזים to the table on ר"ה yet feast on הרע לשון הרע?

The insight Kol Nidrei brings is the idea and realization that on par with the need for improvement on Yom Kippur is the requisite for realization and Hakara (Hisvada) for all that we already have in front of us<sup>6</sup>.

Let us take this *inspiration of Kol Nidrei* and let it carry us through the Day and the year ahead.

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reprimanded him and a friend for not following that Shul's custom because they had felt was not right.

<sup>5</sup> To a point, see Pischei Teshuvos where sources are brought limiting abstention even on Yom Kippur.

<sup>6</sup> I recall once commenting to my 12<sup>th</sup> grade Rebbe that if only we had Neviem then I can be told what I need to do, and I would listen, but nowadays I feel lost. He laughed at my suggestion and said “you don't need a prophet, we already know what the right choices are, we just like to play hard to get.” How true (at least for the average teenager).

## Yizkar Drashah

**T**wo Alter Yidden are talking. "Izzy, you won't believe it! My doctor prescribed this new pill, a memory drug, finally, I feel like I am 30 again!" "Really!?" Izzy responds, "what is it called?" "What is it called...well its called...no...the memory pill...it's called, no...that's not it either. Hmm. What is that flower called... they often come in dozens? Long stemmed, usually red?" "You mean roses?" "Yes! roses", now screaming into the next room, "Rose, honey, what's the name of that new memory pill?"

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The FDA is now investigating a drug that may well become the most controversial pharmaceutical since Prozac came on the market. It's called Propranolol, and it has, believe it or not, the ability to erase bad memories. Discovered by two Professors at the University of California, Irvine, it is best described as follows:

*Understanding propranolol begins with understanding adrenaline, specifically how adrenaline impacts memory. Try to recall the most intense moments of your life (car accidents, fistfights, et cetera). In most cases, you will remember the details from those events far more vividly than less meaningful, more conventional episodes from everyday existence. This is (at least partially) the product of adrenaline; the cerebral rush of adrenaline that accompanies intense circumstances burns those memories into your brain. Adrenaline makes us remember things. (Esquire magazine)*

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There is a fascinating Machlokos that this study may shed some light on:

The Talmud (Yoma 86b) cites two opinions regarding one who repented and confessed on Yom Kippur - if he needs to repeat that act by the next Yom Kippur as well. Rabbeinu Yona (Shaar 4 #21) and others follow the lenient view while the

Rambam (2:8) agrees with the latter. Besides the simple difficulty with this seemingly redundant requirement, is the Pasuk that both the Talmud and the Rambam bring:

**"... וחטאתי נגדי תמיד" (תהלים נא)**

Why would this repeated Teshuvah, presumably already accepted - for otherwise all would agree that Teshuva is critical – be referenced as חטאתי, my *sin(s)*? Also, if it is a constant (תמיד), why only on Yom Kippur are we obliged to repeat the act of return?<sup>7</sup>

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**T**oday when saying the Viduys, do we remember? על חטא...בלשון הרע, do we remember the gossip that we said this year or the pain it caused others? על חטא...במאכלות אסורות, do we remember the food we should have not eaten or the grace after meals, the Al HaMichyas, ignored?

Remember that first time you spoke back to your parent as a child, the rush, the beating heart, *the adrenaline?*

This is *the* indictment.

What happened to the element of risk in committing a sin? Our failure of recall - as these scientists who discovered this drug now taught us - is precisely what this Pasuk and the Rambam's view are perhaps stressing- constantly, by every Chet, there should be a rush of adrenaline, *that sears that moment into our conscience*. We may fulfill Teshuvah one Yom Kippur, and indeed G-d has "forgotten" –*but have we?* Never!

As the great documentary filmmaker, Ken Burns, said recently, "History is not what *was*, but what *is*."

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<sup>7</sup> Many of these questions can be found in the classic commentaries to Rambam. Also difficult is that Rambam is following the view of an Amora (ראב"י) on whom he has already stated (הל"י (ביהב"ח פרק ב הל"י יח) we do not follow, see Keseph Mishna.

Far more than just the scientific, propranolol pushes us to ask the tough philosophical question: how much are we, as individuals, made up of and by our memories?

From the same article:

*How big is your life? That is neither a rhetorical nor impossible question. The answer is easy: Your life is as big as your memory. Forgotten actions still have an impact on other people, but they don't have an impact on you. Reality is defined by what we know, and we (obviously) can't know what we don't remember. What this means is that propranolol provides an opportunity to shrink reality. It doesn't make past events wholly disappear from the mind, but it warps their meaning and context. So if people's personalities are simply the aggregation of their realities (and if reality is just an aggregation of memories), it can be argued that propranolol is a drug that makes people's lives artificially smaller. This makes certain kinds of people nervous, including those involved with the President's Council on Bioethics. (esquire)*

If our life is predicated on our memories, then what are they? Yizkar, whose root is by the Laws of Yom Kippur, is, again, a memory test.

Who do you remember and what do you remember about them? The constants, the excitement brought to study, to Mitzvot. The danger and fear when we were caught doing what we ought not to have done; the bleakness when those we loved were disappointed in us; their joy in our victories.

Well over a decade ago Shlomo Carelbach spent a Shabbos near our home in Thornhill, Canada. It was, perhaps, one of the most memorable Shabbosim I have had. I also witnessed something extraordinary: over the course of Shabbos, Shlomo met well over 500 people and by Shabbos' end he remembered everyone's full (first, middle and last) name. He was brilliant, but he did *not* possess a photographic memory<sup>8</sup>. What he did have was an adrenaline rush of love upon meeting every Jew.

Every year George Will and others have a column on "the Year in Review". These not only provide a quick and fun perusal of recent, and sometimes

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<sup>8</sup> Heard from someone who studied with him in Lakewood Yeshiva.

forgotten, events, but a window into the souls of those writers as well. How do *they* remember? *What* do they remember?

Looking back at this year what do *we* remember? Our successes? Our pleasures, where we dined? Or do we recall those who needed (and perhaps still need) our help and our Tephilos? Do we remember Ertzah HaKadosha; the Jews of Iran; the triumphs of our loved ones; our sins, yes, but our great spiritual victories as well? The moments spent learning, doing Chesed.

Let us always remember by never forgetting and never forget by always remembering.