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Navigate Aging and End-Of-Life
with Jewish Wisdom & Halacha

STANDING BEFORE GOD

AN EMATAI YOM KIPPUR RESOURCE

Articles, Halachic Guidance, and Questions
for Reflection to Enhance Your Yom Kippur

כָּל נִדְרֵי וֶאֱסָרֵי וּשְׁבוּעֵי וַחֲרָמֵי וְקוֹנָמֵי וְכִנּוּיֵי וְקִנּוּסֵי דִּנְדָרְנָא.
וְדְאִשְׁתַּבָּעְנָא. וְדְאַחֲרִימְנָא וְדְאָסְרְנָא עַל נַפְשָׁתָנָא. מִיּוֹם כִּפּוּרִים
זֶה עַד יוֹם כִּפּוּרִים הַבָּא עָלֵינוּ לְטוֹבָה. בְּכֻלְּהוֹן אִתְחָרְטְנָא בְּהוֹן.
כֻּלְּהוֹן יְהוֹן שָׁרָן. בְּיקִין, שְׁבִיתִין, בְּטֵלִין וּמְבָטָלִין, לָא שְׁרִירִין וְלָא
קַיָּמִין: נִדְרָנָא לָא נִדְרֵי. וֶאֱסָרְנָא לָא אֱסָרֵי. וּשְׁבוּעָתָנָא לָא שְׁבוּעוֹת:

Yom Kippur makes us confront the most fundamental truths of human existence: our mortality, our responsibility for our actions, and our enduring relationship with God. It is a day of awe and trembling but also of profound honesty and hopeful introspection. In the face of national tragedy and personal grief, Yom Kippur offers us a framework for meaning, accountability, and renewal. The articles in Ematai's Yom Kippur reader reflect the depth of this sacred time to help us fast with purpose and pray with integrity. May these reflections help deepen your Yom Kippur with greater *kavanah* and inspiration, and may we all merit to be inscribed in the Book of Life.

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Happy Yom Kippur to You?

Yom Kippur as a Fast and a Festival

Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Brody
Originally published in Jewish Ideas Daily

"Happy" is certainly not the first word that comes to mind for most of us when we describe our Yom Kippur experience. After all, the Torah commands us to afflict ourselves on this day (Leviticus 23:26-31). The fasting makes us weak and famished, while the day's other prohibitions—against bathing, anointing, wearing leather, and intimate relations—remind us of mourning practices. The medieval Karaites went still further, interpreting the Torah as requiring the wearing of ashes and sackcloth, sleep deprivation, and similar practices. While traditional Jewish practice rejects unlimited or undefined anguish (synagogue air conditioning systems are regularly checked before the fast!), even our more limited asceticism clearly creates a feeling of deprivation. For good reason, Yom Kippur is colloquially referred to as a Day of Awe, not a holiday. Indeed, the day most similar to Yom Kippur, at least in ritual practice, is Tisha b'Av, the summer fast day considered the saddest day on the calendar.

Yet when we examine the Bible carefully, we see that Yom Kippur is included in the regular list of holidays—designated, like the others, a "sacred occasion." The Sages ordained that on Yom Kippur, as on all festivals, one must wear special clothing to mark the occasion properly. In early medieval times, some Geonim argued that the Yom Kippur prayers should include the customary blessing added to the festival Amidah, which begins, "Bestow on us, Lord our God, the blessings of Your festivals . . . ." While this is not the contemporary practice, we do recite the she-heḥeyanu blessing chanted at joyful moments or events: "Blessed are You . . . Who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this moment." Some scholars even take the position that the meal we eat on Yom Kippur eve, usually understood merely as preparation for the fast, actually fulfills the holiday requirement of a feast.

The tension between these two themes, affliction and joy, is reflected in two salient talmudic passages. In one of them, the Sages, discussing the question of why we do not recite the Hallel prayer of thanksgiving on the High Holidays, record a conversation between the heavenly angels and God (Erkhin 10b):

> The angels asked God, "Why does Israel not chant songs in front of You on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur? God answered, "Is it possible that the King sits on His throne of judgment with the Books of Life and Death open before Him, and the people should recite song?"

The Days of Awe, in other words, are no time for song or other expressions of joyful festivity.

Yet in another passage (Ta'anit 30), the Talmud records that there was no happier occasion than Yom Kippur. On this day, according to rabbinic tradition, God granted forgiveness and exoneration for the sin of the Golden Calf and gave the Jewish people the second set of tablets of the Ten Commandments. This historical event became the paradigmatic Yom Kippur, when the Jewish people receive forgiveness for their own iniquities. The same sentiment is expressed in concrete halakhic terms. Upon the arrival of Yom Kippur, the laws of mourning—for example, sitting shivah for a loved one—are suspended, just as they are for other festivals. One's personal sadness must be put aside when confronted with the communal joy of the Day of Atonement.

Happy Yom Kippur to You?

Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Brody

The need to express a sense of joy in some manner on Yom Kippur was aptly noted by Rabbi Abraham Halevi, an early 18th century scholar in Cairo, where Jews had adopted the custom of sniffing an aromatic tobacco—snuff—on Yom Kippur and other fast days. Some rabbis condemned the practice as an inappropriate form of physical pleasure. Halevi, however, contended that it was perfectly emblematic of the conflicting emotions of Yom Kippur: It allowed for an expression of festival pleasure without violating the commandment of affliction.

These contradictory sentiments might be said to reflect a dialectical tension in the Yom Kippur experience. Fasting and other forms of self-deprivation might weaken us physically; but, like all healthy doses of temporary asceticism, they teach us to concentrate fully on other goals. Abstinence is not mourning, and seriousness is not sadness. Within the reverential environment of the Temple or synagogue, we deny ourselves central physical pleasures in order to allow ourselves to focus on our spiritual selves. Yom Kippur is a day for self-reflection and repentance, when we put aside our lattes and cellphones and work on the things in life that really matter: our relationship to God, family, community, nation, and humanity as a whole.

To a certain extent, the goal of the day is pragmatic: to forgive and be forgiven, to confess genuinely and be pardoned. The joy felt on such an occasion is not one of song and dance. Instead, it is the excitement of rejuvenation and catharsis, of receiving another chance, of being empowered by the knowledge that one can do better and achieve more. Rabbi Jonah of Gerona (13th century, Spain) went so far as to suggest that the Yom Kippur eve feast reflects our joy at having the opportunity for such atonement.

Yet, even beyond expatiation and repentance, the joy of Yom Kippur stems from the opportunity to stand before God and recognize that our decisions in life matter. Will we receive forgiveness of our sins? Is our repentance truly genuine? Ultimately, only God knows. Yet our willingness to stand in prayer before God, engage in self-reflection, and admit to our failings is an acknowledgment that human actions are worthy of examination. As painful as the remorse of repentance might be, and as difficult as it is to genuinely mend our ways, Yom Kippur reflects our belief that we have obligations and responsibilities—that we have a mission in life to fulfill—and, therefore, must scrutinize ourselves to see whether we are working toward accomplishing this goal.

The process of standing before God on Yom Kippur—concentrated, without the distractions of the physical world—affirms that our lives have meaning and purpose. Such affirmation, ultimately, provides the greatest inner satisfaction and happiness. It is a feeling that might not lend itself to the merriness of song and dance, but it does render Yom Kippur the happiest day of the year.

Beyond Self-Affliction:

Isaiah's Revolutionary Vision of Yom Kippur

Haftarah for Yom Kippur Morning | Isaiah 57:14 - 58:14

Adina Blaustein

Excerpted from the author's forthcoming book:
Prophecy and Parashah in Conversation: Essays on the Weekly Haftarah

"Is this the fast I desire? A day for people to afflict their bodies?!" (Isaiah 58:5).

On Yom Kippur, we reach the pinnacle of Jewish observance. Synagogues fill beyond capacity, prayers stretch for hours, and we collectively commit to a day without food or drink. After fasting, confessing, and standing through multiple services, we might reasonably feel we've fulfilled our religious obligations completely. If any day demonstrates our most sincere devotion, surely this is it.

Yet on this most sacred day, when our commitment seems beyond question, the haftarah delivers one of the most searing critiques in all of prophetic literature.

Not only does Isaiah not affirm our piety, he challenges whether we've understood the purpose of this holy day at all. Isaiah's words slice through centuries of ritual practice to expose an uncomfortable truth: self-denial alone misses the point entirely. Our meticulous attention to ritual might actually shield us from the deeper, more demanding work that God requires.

When Ritual Becomes a Shield

Isaiah's revelation begins not with his own accusation, but with the people's genuine bewilderment. "Why, when we fasted, did You not see? When we starved our bodies, did You pay no heed?" (Isaiah 58:3).

Their confusion cuts to the heart of religious life. Isaiah's contemporaries had followed the letter of the law, denying themselves food and drink as prescribed. Yet something essential was missing. The prophet exposes this gap with brutal clarity: "on the fast day you see to your business and oppress all your laborers!" (Isaiah 58:3). The very people who meticulously abstain from food continue to exploit workers, ignore the hungry, and perpetuate systemic inequality.

Isaiah's critique cuts deeper when we recognize how deliberately he echoes and then reimagines the Torah's description of Yom Kippur. In Leviticus the day is framed primarily around denial or "self affliction [*v'initem et nafshotechem*]" (Leviticus 16:31). This language of affliction (*inui*) appears throughout the Torah's instructions for the day, emphasizing personal purification through physical abstinence.[1]

[1] See also Leviticus 23:27-32, which describes the prohibition of work (melakha) on Yom Kippur, referred to as a "Shabbat Shabbaton." This language is echoed in Isaiah 58:13, where the prophet calls for cessation of work (melakha) on the Sabbath, reinforcing the connection between the two texts.

Isaiah quotes this language directly, asking rhetorically: "Is this the fast I desire, a day for people to afflict their bodies [*yom anot adam nafsho*]?" (Isaiah 58:5). By using the Torah's own terminology, he reveals the stark dissonance between the ritual's intention and its practice.

What makes Isaiah's vision revolutionary is that he doesn't simply criticize but reimagines. Instead of focusing inward on self-denial, he demands that his audience look outward: "Share your bread with the hungry, take the wretched poor into your home; when you see the naked, clothe them, and do not ignore your own kin" (Isaiah 58:7).

This shift from personal affliction to social responsibility represents a radical reorientation of Yom Kippur's purpose. Isaiah isn't abolishing the fast; he's expanding its meaning. True self-denial, he suggests, isn't just abstaining from food but giving up the comfort of ignorance, the luxury of indifference, and the privilege of looking away from suffering.

The Mishnah's Subtle Revolution

Centuries after Isaiah, the rabbis of the Mishnah developed a teaching that seems to echo and extend his insight. In Masechet Yoma, they introduce a crucial limitation to the Torah's vision of Yom Kippur: "Transgressions between a person and God, Yom Kippur atones; transgressions between a person and another, Yom Kippur does not atone until he appeases the other person" (Mishnah Yoma 8:9).

This statement represents a seismic shift in understanding. Where the Torah presents atonement as the natural outcome of ritual observance, the Mishnah, like Isaiah, narrows its scope. Interpersonal wrongs cannot be absolved through divine forgiveness alone. The fast, no matter how strictly observed, cannot substitute for the harder work of making amends with those we've harmed.

This rabbinic innovation transforms Yom Kippur from a vertical relationship between individual and God into a three-dimensional engagement that necessarily includes our fellow humans. It acknowledges what Isaiah understood: that our relationship with God cannot be separated from our relationships with others.

Finding New Meaning in the Ancient Fast Day

Both Isaiah and the rabbis spoke to communities grappling with the absence of the Temple. Isaiah's audience sought to rebuild after exile, while the rabbis lived in the aftermath of the Second Temple's destruction. In both cases, the Yom Kippur experience needed to adapt. Without a Temple to purify, its sanctity was redirected toward purifying communal bonds instead.

This evolution offers us a powerful framework for our own observance. Today, we too fast without a Temple. We too struggle to make ancient rituals meaningful in a world that often seems disconnected from biblical paradigms. Isaiah's vision invites us to see this not as a limitation but as an opportunity, a chance to recover what might be the day's truest purpose. The fast he envisions doesn't end when the sun sets and we break our hunger but continues in the actions we take to create a more just world.

Isaiah's critique wasn't meant to abolish Yom Kippur but to restore its revolutionary potential. He shows us that the holiest day of the year calls us not just to deny ourselves but to deny the systems that allow suffering to persist while we look away. In this way, the ancient prophet speaks directly to our modern dilemma, offering not condemnation but possibility: a Yom Kippur that transforms not just ourselves but the world around us.

Confession Before the Day of Judgment

Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Brody

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No one likes confronting mortality, whether their own or that of their loved ones. Yet death is a reality of life which shapes the contours of our existence. It's also one of the themes of the High Holidays when the Book of Life is opened before us. Contemplating "Who will live and who will die?" while reciting selichot and vidui is meant to be a motivation for repentance now and a preparation for the ultimate Day of Judgment when we go up to Heaven.

Given the central role of mortality in the human condition, Jewish law developed many laws and customs that help us confront death and dying. One of them, known as the "last confession" (vidui), has somewhat disappeared in recent centuries. I want to make the case for restoring this meaningful ritual.

The Talmudic sages teach, "One who became ill and tends toward death, they say to him: confess" (Shabbat 32a). The rationale for this ritual is readily apparent. Once a person dies, they cannot confess or make amends. This might be their last opportunity before their personal Day of Judgment.

Indeed, Rabbi Eliezer taught, "Repent one day before your death." His students asked him, "But how do you know when you will die?" To which he replied, "Indeed. Therefore, repent each day so you will live a repentant life" (Shabbat 153a). Given the frailty of life, we should always aspire to have our physical and spiritual affairs in order. This is certainly the case when there is particular concern that one may be dying. This Talmudic ritual was codified in the classic books of Jewish law.

The "last confession" is not meant to be a manipulative ritual trying to curry favor with God, as it were. Instead, it seeks to allow a person to genuinely repent for sins, correct wrongdoings, reconcile with loved ones and acquaintances, and ask for and grant forgiveness. It's also an opportunity to proclaim faith in God and His justice after a lifetime of contemplation and experience. This moment can also be an opportunity to impart final blessings to loved ones and give advice about living a good life.

Despite the ritual's meaningfulness, it is not always possible to implement. In some cases, a person does not have the physical ability to verbalize the prayer. In these cases, many scholars note that the person should articulate these thoughts in their heart, with some suggesting that family members recite the confession aloud. At other times, a dying person might be in a coma. Some scholars feel that there is no point in someone else reciting the prayer at this stage. Others, however, counter that we never truly know which patients might still be able to hear our prayers.

Confession Before the Day of Judgment

Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Brody

In light of these challenges, the natural suggestion is to "move up" the recitation of this last confession to a point when a person is critically ill with an unclear prognosis. This suggestion was already made by classic commentators who felt that it was essential for a person to confess when they are healthy enough to be clear-headed. A person can then recite the confession and proclamations of faith along with holding heart-to-heart conversations. Should they live longer and have another opportunity to confess, they can certainly recite the vidui a second time. After all, as Rabbi Eliezer taught, there's no quota on meaningful confessions. Indeed, Rabbi Hershel Schachter of Yeshiva University told me that his own father, Rabbi Melech Schachter, zt"l, recited this vidui nearly a dozen times, and he merited to live to the age of 94!

A bigger barrier to this ritual is psychological. It's difficult for people to face the probability of their upcoming death. For this reason, the traditional vidui includes a prayer for recovery. Here's the formulation of the standard version: "I acknowledge before You, Lord my God and the God of my ancestors, that my recovery and my death are in Your hands. May it be Your will to send me a complete recovery. Yet if I die, may my death be an atonement for all the errors, iniquities and willful sins that I have erred, sinned and transgressed before You."

Another problem is the emotional difficulty of suggesting to someone that it might be time to recite the vidui. Many classic rabbinic sources contend that if such a suggestion will "break the spirit" of the person, it is best not to mention the idea. Others recommend a soft language, such as: "Many have confessed and not died, and many did not confess and died. As a reward for your confession, may you live. All who confess have a share in the world to come." In some communities, the communal bikur cholim society created a uniform practice to suggest confession on the third day of the acute illness. This might prevent the person from fearing that the visit was made because they are about to die. Yet such a "standardized" schedule becomes difficult in contemporary societies in which modern medicine can keep a person alive for an extended period. Many have suggested that the emotional difficulty to talk about death as well as the extended and uncertain prognosis have caused this ritual to become somewhat sidelined.

Yet as bioethicists Shimon Glick and Alan Jotkowitz have argued, modern societies are more open about speaking about death and dying. Today's doctors are largely inclined not to withhold any information regarding a patient's diagnosis and prognosis. Patients are aware of the acute nature of their illness. Therefore, to withhold discussing the "last confession" is to deny them a critical tool for their spiritual preparations for death.

Moreover, some patients may find solace from the ability to confess and repent while finding meaning from an opportunity for reconciliation. Jewish ritual has provided an important spiritual and emotional tool for the critically ill patient. Why should we deny it to them?

Who Will Live and Who Will Die:

Reflections Before the Yamim Noraim

Bassie Taubes

We are each blessed with a truly miraculous body, a finely tuned system comprising over 78 organs, more than 600 muscles, and approximately 37 trillion cells, all working together in perfect harmony to sustain life. At the center is the heart, beating over 100,000 times a day in steady coordination. If it were to miss even a single beat, the consequences could be serious, or even fatal. This kind of complexity isn't random; it's a divine design. And we are commanded to care for this miraculous gift.

During the summer months, most of us are fortunate to spend more time outdoors enjoying the sun, the beaches, the parks, and long or short walks. We're naturally more inclined to move and to breathe deeply.

But as I do most years, I started thinking about the end of the summer shortly after Shabbos Nachamu. With the days growing shorter and the nights turning just a bit cooler, my mind shifted to the start of the school year, and with it, the awareness that the Yamim Noraim and the Chagim that follow were just around the corner. Every year without fail, many of us comment on whether the holidays are "early" or "late," but whenever they arrive, I often feel emotionally unprepared. I find myself, perhaps like many of you, experiencing a swirl of emotions: hope, gratitude, uncertainty, guilt, and even fear.

I think about the past year - what I've done, both the good and the not-so-good, what I could have done better, and what I've left undone. I think about the words I wish I had said, and the moments I wish I could erase or repair. I reflect on my relationships with the people in my life and with the Ribbono Shel Olam. The Yamim Noraim are a time of cheshbon hanefesh, self-reflection, repentance, change, and sometimes, acceptance.

Personally, I love the davening on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur - the words, the familiar tunes, the songs that echo through the shul and stir our hearts and souls. The rhythm of the day is mirrored in the tefillot themselves, with soaring highs and quiet lows. We feel it all - the longing, the regret, the hope - through the prayers and the melodies that carry them.

Prominent among them is *Unetaneh Tokef*, that prayer we both dread and anticipate.

"מי יחיה ומי ימות — *Who will live and who will die?*" Who in their time, and who before their time... Even as I write these words, and certainly when I say them, I feel a heaviness. I think about the people who stood in shul last year, reciting those very words, who are no longer here. Did they feel or know that they would not be standing with us this year?

Who Will Live and Who Will Die:
Reflections Before the Yamim Noraim

By: Bassie Taubes

Our posture during the High Holidays is defined by a profound tension. We are asked to hold two seemingly contradictory truths in our minds at once.

On one hand, we believe that our actions matter. Every year, we raise our voices and declare:

"ותשובה ותפילה וצדקה מעבירין את רוע הגזירה" — Repentance, prayer, and charity annul the severity of the decree.

This is a core part of our faith, embodied in the story of Chanah's fervent prayer, which we read as part of the haftarah on the first day of Rosh Hashanah. It reminds us that God sees human effort and intention. This is the time to put forth our best efforts and to believe that we can truly shape our future ourselves.

Yet, we also stand before Hashem with the humble awareness that we are but a feather in the wind. As Chanah later says:

"שְׂבֵעִים בַּלֶּחֶם נִשְׂכָּרוּ וּרְעֵבִים חָדֵלוּ,
עַד־עֲקָרָה יָלְדָה שִׁבְעָה וְרַבַּת בָּנִים אֻמְלָלָה"

"The sated must hire out for bread, the starving hunger no more; while the infertile woman bears seven, the mother of many is forlorn."

We acknowledge that much of life is beyond our control in a world where events can seem random and arbitrary. This randomness can feel like a great blessing when good fortune finds us, but it can also feel cruel and unjust, making us question whether our actions truly matter at all. If we had all truly changed our ways, davened with greater concentration, or given more tzedakah, would the people we loved and lost still be with us? These are questions with no clear answers.

One of the unique challenges of the Yomin Noraim is to bravely embrace this paradox. We make our requests and heartfelt pleas with the conviction that we may be worthy of a good life, even while knowing full well that the outcome lies beyond us. These sacred days, which highlight the delicate balance between justice and mercy, call on us to hold fast to both of these truths.

We must all put in our hishtadlut (our personal effort) in caring for the bodies God has entrusted to us. That means eating nourishing food and savoring the blessing of sustenance; drinking water and staying hydrated; moving the body regularly so it can serve us well; sleeping at night so that body and brain can rest; and striving to live with joy and purpose. It means managing stress, cultivating gratitude, and approaching each day with intention.

It's a big responsibility, and yet we are not promised full control over the outcome. We all know people who did "everything right," who exercised, ate well, and lived with care, yet still became ill or passed away "before their time." That tension can feel deeply unsettling. But this is the sacred space where we give ourselves over to faith. We act with purpose, and we pray with humility. We live as partners with God, doing our part and surrendering the rest.

Having entered this Yom Tov season, let us reflect with open hearts and honest intentions. Let's care for our bodies with appreciation for the miracle they are. Let's work on our relationship with God; through tefillah, connection, and acts of kindness. Let's reach out to those we've hurt, forgive those who have hurt us, and strengthen our families and our communities.

We may not control what lies ahead, but we can choose how we show up - with humility, with resolve, and with a deep awareness that life is both strong and fragile.

May this season of *teshuvah, tefillah*, and *tzedakah* lead us to a year of blessing, health, and peace, for ourselves, our loved ones, and all of Am Yisrael.

Yizkor After the Black Sabbath

Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Brody

Adapted from an article originally published in Tablet Magazine Spring 2024

When thinking about the losses on October 7th and in the subsequent war, we are sometimes at a loss for words. What can one say? As we approach Yizkor this coming Yom Kippur and Simchat Torah, it's helpful to understand the roots of Yizkor and see how we've responded to communal tragedies in the past.

Imagine a community in which two of its members, we'll call them Reuben and Shimon, died in the month before Passover. Both were well-liked, respected family men who died young, at the age of 46. Yet Shimon died from a tragic accident, while Reuben was murdered, along with many others, in a pogrom. That Passover, in the midst of the festival prayer services, the community recited a special prayer to "uplift the soul" of Reuben and memorialize his loss. Privately missing the presence of their own loved one during the holiday, Shimon's family insisted the next year that they, too, could memorialize him during the synagogue services. The fact that Simon wasn't a martyr, they said, doesn't mean his soul, and memory, doesn't merit recognition.

This, in a nutshell, is the likely emotional impetus for the murky historical development of the Yizkor memorial service. Today, Yizkor is mostly known for the memorial prayers recited by individuals for deceased family members. Frequently overlooked are the communal memorial prayers recited.

As with many ritual customs, it's hard to trace a linear historical development of this festival memorial ritual. At its core, the Yizkor service comprises two short prayers that beseech God to favorably recall a loved one in Heaven, with one of them including a charitable pledge in their merit. As Professor Shmuel Glick has shown, the notion of prayers and charity for the deceased emerged in the early medieval period, albeit with some controversy. It wasn't obvious to all scholars that such prayers were efficacious or theologically appropriate. Can we really help the dead or impact the World to Come? Some suggested Yom Kippur as a special day on which atonement could be achieved for both the living and the dead. Others felt that death was a finite endpoint; you cannot rectify deeds once you've left this world.

A turning point toward broad acceptance of praying for the deceased seems to have come in 1096 CE. During the First Crusades, Rhineland Jewry was attacked by Christian crusaders on their way to the Holy Land. They demanded that Jews convert to Christianity. Many who refused were murdered; some took their own lives rather than convert. In the wake of this trauma, the Av Ha-Rahamim ("Father of mercy") prayer was written. The prayer beseeches God to remember "the pious, upright, and blameless, the holy communities, who laid down their lives for the sanctification of His name." It further calls on God to take revenge for their spilled blood and retaliate against His enemies.

Initially, this prayer was seemingly only recited on the Sabbath before the holiday of Shavuot, around the time when many of these massacres took place. After the pogroms of 1348-49, when many Jews were slaughtered in the wake of the Black Plague, Av Ha-Rahamim was also added on the Saturday before the summer fast of Tisha B'Av. It became known as the "Black Sabbath."

After the 1648-49 Chmielnicki massacres in Poland and Ukraine, another prayer emerged, known as El Malei Rahamim ("God who is full of

mercy"). Besides praying for the martyrs to enter the Garden of Eden, it includes the memorable line: "We beseech the Merciful One to protect them under divine wings, and to bind their soul up in the bonds of life." In the following years, the prayer was adjusted to apply to martyrs from other communities, victims of the great 1689 fire in Prague, and other calamities.

Beyond prayers, the post-1096 martyrs were memorialized in a communal book known as a sefer zikaron ("Book of Remembrance"), or Memorbücher in Germanic languages. The list of names was introduced with the prayerful wish: "May God remember [Yizkor Elokim]." Alongside the martyrs, communal leaders or benefactors were listed. These names would then be read aloud in the community. Reading the book turned into a communal ritual.

These prayers all emerged as a form of collective commemoration. Today, Av Ha-Rahamim remains a communal memorial recited on every Sabbath, but it has become a generic prayer for all martyrs, largely decoupled from the incidents of 1096. The Yizkor and El Malei Rahamim prayers, in contrast, are utilized during all individual remembrances and even at funerals. How did this happen?

It's not entirely clear. By the 17th century, Yizkor was added to the prayers of three major festivals: Sukkot, Passover, and Shavuot. The springboard for that expansion might have been the custom of giving charity on each of these holidays, in fulfillment of the biblical notion, alluded to in the traditional Torah reading, of not coming "empty-handed" before the Lord on these special days. Once charity was being offered, it became an opportunity to donate in memory of a particular loved one, perhaps akin to what was already practiced on Yom Kippur.

Most probably, it seems that prayers written for communal loss simply fit the emotional needs for mourners to commemorate personal loss. Even if your loved ones are not martyrs, the desire to help them in Heaven—and recall them on the holy day—is deeply felt.

In this respect, it pays to note that Sephardic Jews, to this day, never adopted the communal Yizkor prayer. These rituals marked tragedies in Ashkenazi lands. Yet Sephardic Jews did develop an individual memorial prayer, known as a hashkava, that prays for the soul of the deceased. This is traditionally recited at funerals, during shiva, on the annual memorial day (sometimes called the meldado), and any time their descendants participate in the Torah reading (aliyah). Like their Sephardic brethren, Ashkenazi Jews needed a moving prayer to fulfill their emotional and spiritual needs, independent of how their loved one died. Today, of course, Yizkor has become a highlight on the ritual calendar, a service that even brings unaffiliated Jews out to the synagogue.

That's not a problem per se. But it's regrettable that we've lost sight of the communal origins of this memorial prayer. Given the many travails of Jewish history, it's natural for Jews to no longer commemorate, if not forget, the massacres of 1348 or 1648. Yet we've also had more recent tragedies that we should not easily erase.

Following the Shoah, many synagogues began to recite a special El Malei Rahamim for Holocaust victims. There are different variations, but most commemorate "the souls of the 6 million Jews, victims of the European Holocaust, who were murdered, slaughtered, burnt and exterminated for the Sanctification of thy Name, by the German Nazi murderers and their helpers from other nations." Alas, in recent years, it seems that a few synagogues have regrettably stopped saying this memorial. Perhaps there will come a point when we no longer feel the need to specially mark the Holocaust—1096, 1348, and 1945 will be things of the past. To my mind, we are far away from such a time. When survivors and their children are still alive, it's critical to maintain this

commemoration so that their grandchildren and great-grandchildren will continue to bear witness to this atrocity.

In current times, Yizkor recitations need to focus on our newest communal loss: the thousands of souls that we've lost in Israel since Oct. 7. When the cuts are so deep and the wounds so fresh, we need to memorialize those souls, Jewish and non-Jewish alike, who died at the hands of our enemies. Of course, we can still mark our private, individual losses. The heart is big enough to encompass personal and national mourning. Much of the world seems to have forgotten what happened on that new Black Sabbath. We owe it to these brothers and sisters to come out, en masse, and remember what we have lost.

There are different versions of new Yizkor tefilot being circulated, but Ematai recommends an adaptation of El Malei Rahamim composed by IDF Chief Cantor Shai Abramson.

God, full of mercy, Who dwells on high, grant fitting rest on the wings of the Divine Presence—in the heights of the holy, the pure and the brave, who shine like the radiance of heaven—To the souls of the holy ones, residents of Israel—men, women, and children—who were killed, murdered, burned and slaughtered by the vile Hamas murderers, and who sacrificed their lives in the consecration of God's name in the vicious attacks on the dwelling places of the State of Israel; and To the souls of the soldiers of the Israel Defense Forces, the officers of the Israel Police, and the members of the security services who sacrificed their lives for the consecration of God's name and died a heroic death in battles defending the people and the land. For this we pray for the ascent of their souls, may they rest in the Garden of Eden.

Therefore, Master of Compassion, shelter them in the shadow of Your wings forever, and bind their souls in the bond of everlasting life. The Lord is their heritage. May they rest in peace and may they receive their reward at the End of Days.

And let us say:

Amen.

Guidelines for the Ill on Yom Kippur

Taken with permission from *Guide to Traditional Jewish Observance in a Hospital* by Rabbi Dr. Jason Weiner

Yom Kippur—the Day of Atonement, beginning eight days after Rosh Hashanah—is the holiest day of the Jewish calendar. Jews refrain from all eating and drinking for this entire day (commencing before sundown and concluding after nightfall the following day). Other pleasures, such as bathing or applying non-medical ointments, are also restricted.

Prayer

1. One who is unable to recite all of the Yom Kippur prayers should try to say at least the short confession ("Viduy Katzar"), "Chatati, Aviti, Pashati" and then ask God to cleanse and forgive them, and conclude with their own praise of God.[347]

2. One who is in an unclean environment may nevertheless recite the "Viduy" (confession) of Yom Kippur if they have no other choice, but without mentioning God's name.[348]

Eating

3. Just as it is permitted, and even obligatory, to violate the laws of Shabbat in order to save life, so too it is a Mitzvah for a person whose life may be in danger to eat and drink (or transgress any other prohibition of the day) on Yom Kippur. Even a person who is not currently in mortal danger, but may become dangerously ill if they do not eat or drink, must eat or drink on Yom Kippur. [349]

   One who decides to be "strict" and fast despite the directive of their doctor and rabbi not to do so, is not considered pious but like a shedder of blood, about whom we apply the verse, "your blood, of your souls, I will demand an account."[350]

4. A doctor's orders, irrespective of his or her religion, must be followed when they say that a patient must eat, even if the patient thinks that they can go without food.[351] If a doctor is not available, anyone who has any knowledge of medicine is trusted when they say that the patient must eat or drink to save their lives[352]

   If one is instructed to eat or drink, and they have time to consult with a rabbi, they must do so, particularly to find out if they should eat normal amounts or in measurements (see next section for explanation of this concept). However, if the case is urgent and life-threatening, and the physician has ordered the patient to eat without any delay, the doctor's orders must be followed.[353]

[347] Lev Avraham 18:39; Mishnah Berurah 607:12.

[348] Lev Avraham 18:40, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach adds that in such a case one should also not have in mind to be fulfilling the Mitzvah of "Viduy."

[349] Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchatah 39:1.

[350] Mishnah Berurah 618:5.

[351] Shulchan Aruch OH 618:1.

[352] Mishnah Berurah 618:1.

[353] Lev Avraham 18:5.

The patient's own opinion that he or she is in need of food overrides that of a physician who disagrees,[354] unless the physician is of the opinion that food would actually do the patient harm.[355]

5. One should stay in bed in order to be able to fast on Yom Kippur rather than consume food or drink (even if only by measurements) so that they will be able to attend synagogue.[356]

6. A patient who is fed via an NG tube or PEG may continue to be fed in this manner on Yom Kippur (though one should not initiate feeding of this sort just in order to avoid the ruling of the doctor or rabbi regarding eating or drinking on Yom Kippur).[357]

7. Even one who is permitted to eat on Yom Kippur as a result of their poor health should eat only enough to provide the necessary nutrition and not consume any treats that they do not need to sustain them.[358]

8. One who only needs to drink but can avoid eating, for example to prevent a kidney stone, may drink (even beverages besides water, such as milk with sugar or fruit juice), but may not eat. If they must drink normal amounts they may do so; otherwise they should drink only in measurements.[359]

9. A diabetic patient receiving insulin, either by continuous infusion pump or by multiple injections, should fast on Yom Kippur if their doctor agrees that this will not put them in danger, by adjusting doses of insulin (by measuring the blood glucose levels).[360]

10. In any situation in which a patient must eat on Yom Kippur, the rabbi's and the physician's opinion must be sought regarding whether it will be sufficient to feed the patient in measurements (discussed below) or if the patient needs to eat regular amounts. Furthermore, one must also determine if it is sufficient to provide only beverages, or if the patient must eat food as well. There may also be times when one is permitted to eat once on Yom Kippur because of a great need, but they may still not eat any more after that.[361]

Blessings

11. One who must eat on Yom Kippur does not recite Kiddush or use two loaves of bread, even if it is also Shabbat.[362]

12. Patients who must eat on Yom Kippur are obligated to wash their hands if they eat bread in the same manner as they would were it not Yom Kippur. [363]

13. One who is going to eat an amount of bread equivalent to the volume of an egg (approximately 1.9-2.95 fl ounces) within nine minutes should also make the blessing over washing their hands. However, if one will not be eating this amount of bread, they should wash their hands without making the blessing.[364]

14. One who must eat on Yom Kippur makes the appropriate blessing before eating food, but when eating in "measurements" (as discussed below) they need only make the blessing once, and not repeat it every time they swallow food, unless they assumed that they would not need to eat any more.[365]

15. One who eats an amount of food equivalent to the size of an olive (approximately 1.1-1.5

[354] Mishnah Berurah 618:4.

[355] Aruch Hashulchan 618:5-6.

[356] Lev Avraham 18:7.

[357] Ibid., 18:8-9.

[358] Ibid., 18:20.

[359] Ibid., 18:13.

[360] Ibid., 18:13.

[361] Lev Avraham 18:14; Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchatah 39:6.

[362] Mishnah Berurah 618:29; Lev Avraham 18:26.

[363] Lev Avraham 18:25, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach explains that one would wash their entire hand despite the prohibition against washing on Yom Kippur because this is not washing for pleasure.

[364] Shulchan Aruch OH 158:2.

[365] Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchatah 39:23.

ounces) within nine minutes must make the blessing after eating that food. If one ate bread, "Yaaleh V'Yaavoh" is inserted into the "Birkat Hamazon," although if one forgot, they need not repeat the "Birkat Hamazon."[366]

Taking Medication on Yom Kippur

16. One who has a non-life-threatening serious illness or may become ill without medication, may swallow pills if their doctor requires them to, but only if they can do so without swallowing any water along with it. It may be worthwhile to practice swallowing medication without water before Yom Kippur. If one is unable to do this and must take the medications, one may use a minimal amount of water to assist them in swallowing, but the flavor of the water should be made bad tasting by adding something bitter.[367]

17. However, one who is dangerously ill or may become so if they don't take their medication, may use undiluted water to help them swallow their medication if they are unable to do so without water.[368]

18. One who is healthy at the moment, but without medication will become ill, even not dangerously so (such as experience migraines or vomiting), may swallow a pill without water to prevent this condition. However, it is better to take the medication via a suppository, if possible.[369]

Eating in "Measurements," Food

1. Though we have pointed out that one whose life may be endangered by fasting on Yom Kippur is obligated to eat, not all patients who are obligated to eat on Yom Kippur have the same exemption. Some patients' illnesses warrant only minimal eating or drinking as described below. This method is referred to as eating in "measurements" and it refers to eating less than a prescribed amount within a given period of time:

2. The prohibition against eating on Yom Kippur is unique since "eating" isn't prohibited, but rather the Torah obligates "Inuy" or self-affliction (Leviticus 23:29). Eating an amount of food equivalent to a large date[370] is necessary to be considered culpable, because the rabbis ruled that any less than this does not put a person at ease and they are still "afflicted."[371]

   This amount is approximately 30 ml (or cc),372 which is equivalent to just under one liquid ounce. One should measure before Yom Kippur how much food can be squeezed into a one ounce whisky shot glass and eat just a bit under that amount.[373]

   It must be pointed out that these measurements apply to unique circumstances when one has specific permission to eat on Yom Kippur and only reference avoiding the punishment of "Karet" (spiritual excision) for eating on Yom Kippur. If it is not a life-threatening situation, partaking of even any amount of food or drink on Yom Kippur, regardless of how small, is prohibited by the Torah.[374]

3. One who is permitted to eat this minimal amount should preferably wait nine minutes (or at least 6-7 minutes)[375] from the time they finish the previous consumption until they begin eating or drinking again.[376] However, if the doctor determines that it is necessary for the patient to consume the food in a shorter span of time, one may do so.[377]

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[366] Lev Avraham 18:27; Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchatah 39:33.

[367] Ibid., 18:11-12, Dr. Abraham quotes Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach as allowing drops of soap to be added to the water to render it poor tasting, so that it is also considered drinking in an unusual manner, which is permitted for a non-dangerously ill patient. Some advise putting bitter-tasting Echinacea in water to use as the bitter drink (one should consult with a health care professional to determine if it is advisable to consume Echinacea on a fast day); others advise using something that is not fit for food, like Maalox, to get the medication down.

[368] Ibid., in the name of Igrot Moshe OH 3:91

[370] Shulchan Aruch OH 612:1.

[371] Mishnah Berurah 612:1.

[372] Nishmat Avraham OH 612:1.

[373] Rabbi Gershon Bess.

[374] Shulchan Aruch OH 612:5 & Mishnah Berurah 612:11. 375 Aruch Hashulchan OH 618:14.

[376] Lev Avraham 18:17; Shulchan Aruch OH 612:7.

[377] Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchatah 39:19; Lev Avraham 18:17. If one is unable to wait nine minutes between each food intake, or even 6-7 minutes, they should try to wait two minutes at the very least, if possible (Nishmat Avraham OH 612:4(6)).

4. It is important to point out that these measurements govern the amount of food one eats, not the quality. One who must eat in this manner on Yom Kippur is thus advised to get the most out of their minimal consumption and choose foods with a lot of calories and nutrition to help sustain them throughout the day.[378] One should also discuss with their doctor what the ideal food or drink would be for them to consume in these small amounts.[379]

5. Since eating in measurements is preferable to eating larger amounts, one whose health condition and rabbinic ruling allow them to eat in measurements should begin doing so in the morning, to prevent their condition from deteriorating, thus forcing them to eat a larger amount of food.[380]

Eating in "Measurements," Beverages

6. The amount of liquid consumed on Yom Kippur to be considered culpable is more than a cheek-full, because the rabbis ruled that any less than this does not put a person at ease and they are still "afflicted."[381] For an adult this is generally about 40 ml of water,[382] which is about 1.3 ounces. The amounts of all liquids consumed, if one drinks different types, are added up and measured together for this purpose.[383]

   One can ascertain his or her personal "cheek-full" by filling their mouth completely with water, expelling the water into a measuring cup and dividing that amount in half. This number is the amount held by one cheek, and the amount permitted is slightly less than this amount.[384]

   It is advisable, but not obligatory, that all measurements be made before Yom Kippur. [385]

7. One who is permitted to drink in measurements may drink beverages other than water, such as milk with sugar or fruit juice.[386]

8. One should wait the same amount of time between drinks as is required for eating (paragraph 3 above), but if this is still insufficient for the patient, they should at least wait for a few moments (15-30 seconds)[387] between these minimal drinks.[388]

9. Amounts of food and beverage are not combined, so that one may eat the minimal amount and then immediately drink the minimal amount.[389] However, if food, such as bread, has been soaked in a liquid, the measurements are combined so that one may still not eat more than 30 ml of this combined product.[390]

10. If an item is normally chewed, then it is considered food, and if it is normally swallowed like a drink (such as porridge or sour cream), it is considered a beverage for these purposes."[391]

Pregnancy and Childbirth on Yom Kippur

1. A pregnant woman who is well, and her fetus is well, must fast on Yom Kippur during all stages of pregnancy.[392] She should rest and avoid any strenuous activity or even going to synagogue. If she feels abnormal weakness she should drink in measurements, and if she needs, eat in measurements as well.[393]

   If she begins feeling regular contractions before she is full term, she should drink as much as necessary in order to stop the contractions. If she is full term and gets contractions, she should consult her obstetrician regarding drinking so as not to be dehydrated when giving birth.[394]

   Since a woman who has become pregnant following in vitro fertilization is more likely to miscarry during the first weeks after becoming

[378] Lev Avraham 18:18.
[379] Ibid 18:21.
[380] Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchatah 39 fn. 69 (1979 edition).
[381] Shulchan Aruch OH 612:9.
[382] Lev Avraham 18:21.
[383] Mishnah Berurah 612:23.
[384] Rabbi Dovid Heber, Star-K Kashrus Guide to Halachic Food Measurements
[385] Mishnah Berurah 618:21.
[386] Lev Avraham 18:18 in the name of Rav
[392] Lev Avraham 18:30; Shulchan Aruch OH 618:1.
[393] Lev Avraham 18:30.
[394] Ibid; Rabbi Gershon Bess.

pregnant, during these early stages of pregnancy she should drink in measurements.[395]

2. From the time a woman is in active labor until seventy-two hours after she gives birth, she may not fast at all.[396]

   During this period, even if she and her doctor think that she is able to fast, she should eat, but in measurements.[397]

3. After seventy-two hours following childbirth, i.e. from day four through day seven, the following rules apply:

   - If the woman wants to eat and the physician doesn't disagree, or if the physician considers it necessary and she doesn't think that she needs to, then in both of these cases she should eat normal amounts.
   - If she wants to eat but the physician does not consider it necessary, or if she is not sure and the physician does not say that she needs to eat, then she should eat only in measurements.
   - If she says that she does not need to eat and the physician agrees, she should fast.[398]

   These time categories are based on the number of hours since giving birth. Therefore a woman's category may change during Yom Kippur itself.[399]

4. After the seven days following childbirth, the woman is classified as one who has a non-life-threatening serious illness until day thirty. A woman in this category must fast[400] unless her condition deteriorates and she or her doctor feels that it may become life- threatening, in which case she must eat.[401]

5. The above rules apply equally in the case of a woman who has a live birth, a stillbirth, an abortion, or miscarriage more than forty days after becoming pregnant.[402]

6. A nursing woman is obligated to fast on Yom Kippur. [403] If the baby drinks formula, she should feed the baby with formula rather than break her fast. However, she may drink (but not eat) in measurements if she would not otherwise have sufficient milk for her baby and the baby is entirely dependent on her milk for its sustenance, thus putting the baby's life in danger.[404] She should try to avoid this situation by drinking large quantities of liquid before Yom Kippur begins.[405]

[395] Ibid.

[396] Shulchan Aruch OH 617:4 & Mishnah Berurah 9, 13; Mishnah Berurah 330:10-11. During this time a woman may also wash, on Yom Kippur, any body parts that became soiled during child birth (Torat Hayoledet 55:15 (2nd ed.).

[397] Ibid., 617:4 & Mishnah Berurah

[402] Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchatah 39:16.

[403] Shulchan Aruch OH 617:1.

[404] Shemirat Shabbat Kehilchatah 39:18.

[405] Ibid.

For specific questions please contact your rabbi before Yom Kippur, or reach out to Ematai's Robert M. Beren Medical Halacha Helpline.

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Conversation Starters for Yom Kippur

Mortality and the Book of Life

The Unetaneh Tokef prayer forces us to say out loud what we usually try not to think about. Every year, we recite these words about who will live and who will die, and many of us feel our stomachs tighten:

> בְּרֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה יִכָּתֵבוּן, וּבְיוֹם צוֹם כִּפּוּר יֵחָתֵמוּן.
> כַּמָּה יַעַבְרוּן, וְכַמָּה יִבָּרֵאוּן, מִי יִחְיֶה, וּמִי יָמוּת
>
> On Rosh Hashanah it is inscribed, and on Yom Kippur it is sealed - how many shall pass away and how many shall be born, who shall live and who shall die
>
> *Unetaneh Tokef*

It's natural to hear these words and feel anxious about what the coming year might bring. But Rav Soloveitchik suggests something surprising: Facing our mortality head-on might actually calm us down rather than frighten us:

> "When one's perspective is shifted from the illusion of eternity to the reality of temporality, one finds peace of mind and relief from other worries, from his petty fears and from absurd stresses and nonsensical nightmares."
>
> *—Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Out of the Whirlwind, p. 132*

Rav Soloveitchik offers us a paradox: acknowledging our mortality can actually quiet our fears rather than amplify them. When we stop pretending we're here forever, we can finally see what really matters. The very words that seem designed to terrify us might instead become a source of clarity, helping us distinguish between genuine concerns and the "nonsensical nightmares" that consume so much of our mental energy.

What Do We Pray For?

When we stand before God during the Yamim Noraim, what are we actually asking for? Rabbi Jonathan Sacks suggests that once we truly face our mortality, our prayers become surprisingly simple:

> "We don't ask for wealth or fame, stardom or success. We don't pray to be spared trials and tribulations. We just ask for life. That is what Judaism is: a life of love and a love of life. All the rest is commentary."
>
> *—Rabbi Jonathan Sacks*
> *Letters to the Next Generation: Reflections for Yom Kippur*

But Rabbi Sacks pushes us further - it's not enough just to want life. We need to figure out how to love it, even when it's fragile:

> "Life is short, but when we lift our eyes to heaven, we walk tall."
>
> *—Rabbi Jonathan Sacks*
> *"The Consolations of Mortality" (Chukat) in Judaism's Life Changing Ideas*

SHARE & REFLECT:

Think about your past experiences praying during the High Holidays. Have you mostly prayed for yourself, or do you spend more time thinking about other people? How has that balance changed over the years?

What does it look like to "love life" and "walk tall" when you're dealing with loss, illness, or disappointment?

What's the difference between focusing on mortality versus death? How might that change your daily choices?

Conversation Starters for Yom Kippur

Living with Mortality

The high holiday season hits differently if you or someone close to you has been sick, or if you've experienced a loss. Sometimes that can make the prayers feel too personal and overwhelming. Rabbi Shlomo Brody suggests that a change in mindset can be helpful:

> "The time of our death is not known, but the reality of our mortality is a fact. By focusing on our mortality, as opposed to our deaths, we will repent daily and ensure our good names in life and beyond,"
>
> *—Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Brody*
> *"Mortality," Sources, Spring 2024*

During the Yamim Noraim, we often think about death, who will live and who will die. But Rabbi Brody reminds us that it's not just death we need to face. It's mortality, the everyday truth that our lives are limited, fragile, and not entirely in our control. That awareness isn't meant to scare us, it's meant to wake us up to what matters most.

Rabbi Brody notes that focusing on our mortality, on the ways that we are fragile and limited, is different from focusing on death itself. Does that distinction make sense to you?

How might this perspective encourage you to experience the high holiday season more and pray more productively?

For many, the words "Who shall live and who shall die" are very difficult. How are you impacted by these words?

For those who can't fast, can't stand for long periods, or are spending holidays in hospitals - how do you find spiritual meaning when the usual routines aren't available?

What does spiritual honesty look like when you can't show up for the holidays in the usual ways?

Conversation Starters for Yom Kippur

Channah's Tefilah: Speaking from the Soul

Sometimes prayer happens in whispers. On Rosh Hashanah, we read in the haftarah on the first day about Channah's nearly silent plea for a child:

> וְחַנָּה הִיא מְדַבֶּרֶת עַל לִבָּהּ רַק שְׂפָתֶיהָ נָּעוֹת וְקוֹלָהּ לֹא יִשָּׁמֵעַ
>
> Channah was praying in her heart, only her lips were moving and her voice was not heard
>
> *Shmuel 1, 1:13*

Channah's story feels especially relevant during the High Holidays. Sometimes, in the midst of loud, communal prayer and singing, it's our soft whisper of tefilla that feels most meaningful and impactful.

When have you felt most connected during prayer: in the communal singing of Kol Nidre, or in a quiet moment when you were thinking your own thoughts?

Think about telling someone 'I'm scared' versus just feeling scared silently. How does putting feelings into words change them - and does that happen in prayer too?

Davening on Behalf of Others

There are moments, especially during illness, when someone cannot pray out loud, or at all. But that doesn't mean their voice is lost.

> "Some scholars note that the person should articulate these thoughts in their heart, with some suggesting that family members recite the confession aloud."
>
> *—Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Brody*
> *"Confession Before the Day of Judgment,"*
> *Jewish Link, 2023*

Rabbi Brody reminds us that Jewish tradition honors even the quietest expressions of the soul. A confession whispered in the heart, or said on someone else's behalf, still carries meaning. Prayer, after all, is not measured by volume, but by presence, intention, and love.

What does it mean to be a voice for someone who can't speak or doesn't know how?

Who slips into your thoughts during prayer? How do you balance praying for yourself vs. praying for others?

What might it look like to "carry" someone else's tefilah in your own this Yom Kippur?

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