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I wonder if you have ever noticed that the tradition of Kol Nidre is the strangest any people ever had. Other peoples generally solemnify their New Year by making resolutions and reenforcing their old promises. We Jews, on the contrary, celebrate this evening, this climax of our New Year season, by announcing that we hereby break our promises and abrogate our vows. אנינין אלהינו לא נאמרו ... 'אנינין אלהינו לא נאמרו. All vows shall not be binding and shall not have power. A strange way indeed for religious people to observe a Day of Atonement and look forward to a new and fruitful year!

And yet, in a way, this is a very important condition for the observance of Yom Kippur. Of course, according to Jewish Law, Kol Nidre releases a man only from those vows made between him and G-d, not from those in which any other individual is concerned. But in a broader sense, this abrogation of vows is really significant. It means that we begin this holiest of holy days by each personally divorcing himself from his past. We begin with a new slate. We know from experience that the past has been a greivous one, not too good, perhaps sinful, something of which we might not be too proud if it were completely revealed. There are certain vows which we have made, silently and even unconsciously, which we must annul. Some of us, in the privacy of our hearts, may have decided to pay more attention to business and profit, and less to reading and study; more to sports and less to synagogue; more to personal advancement, less to community progress. On this Kol Nidre night, then, we absolve these vows. We break clean with the past. We begin a year totally fresh and new. We will not allow the dead hand of the past to slap the face of the present. We start with a clean slate.

Now, why is it so important that we begin anew? Because this day is the day of great decision. It is the day when every man and woman must choose his course, and with the knowledge that upon this course depends the future of an entire year and perhaps an entire lifetime. And in such a time, one does not want to be burdened by the misdeeds of yesterday. This, my friends, is a time of uncertainty when heavy hearts are called upon to make up their troubled minds. It is a period of transition, and the future depends squarely upon us. Jewish Law directs that the Kol Nidre services be held bein hashmashos, at twilight, during that time which is neither light nor dark, between the passing day and the oncoming night. It is in this bein hashmashos, 'twixt dusk and dawn, and in this bein hashmashos of a year, between an old year gone by and a new year coming in, that Man is gripped by the Twilight Mood, that troubled uncertainty when the uncharted future lies before him like a blank diary waiting for him to write in the entries. אנינין אלהינו לא נאמרו ... 'אנינין אלהינו לא נאמרו
 "On Rosh Hashana it is decided and on Yom Kippur it is confirmed; during this transitional period it is determined: אנינין אלהינו לא נאמרו ... 'אנינין אלהינו לא נאמרו - who shall live and who shall die; who is at the end of his days and who is not; who shall become poor and who shall become rich; who shall be brought low and who shall be upraised". And man knows that these matters are not solely the works of a whimsical Fate or Destiny, but dependent upon him and his actions and his conduct. For in this Book of Records, אנינין אלהינו לא נאמרו ... 'אנינין אלהינו לא נאמרו, appears every man's and every woman's personal signature. Man signs the Heavenly Decrees. What his future will be depends, therefore, on what Man is willing to commit himself to, on what he is willing to sign to, during this very short transitional period.

Psychologists tell us that the most critical days in a person's life are those of his adolescence. This stage of life is fraught with dangers of all kinds; a wrong turn during this time can make a criminal of a boy, it can pervert his sense of morals, instil in him a hatred for society and lead him onto the path of ultimate destruction. At the same time, however, great and wonderful possibilities lie dormant within him. During his adolescence he can bring out untapped talents and develop latent genius. A parent can help an adolescent onto the right path, or, by neglecting him, allow him to step into the abyss of an evil and unrewarding life. This adolescence is the bein hashmashos, the twilight and transition period of one's life.

Sec. of State would not keep his threat; that even if he would, it was "now or never" in the matter of statehood; that he did not intend to preside over the death of a 2,000 year old dream. When Ben Gurion saw that he was going to lose, he put in a hurried call to Rabbi Maimon, that staunch old Zionist who later became Minister of Religion, who was then in Jerusalem. When Rabbi Maimon was apprised of these events, he decided to make his way to Tel Aviv immediately. The roads between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv had been cut by the Arabs, so the old Rabbi put on his hat and coat, took along only his *hairs n'c*, and in a matter of minutes was flying to Tel Aviv in a two-seater airplane, braving Arab ack-ack fire all along the way. The rest is history. That grand old man persuaded the assembled delegates to proceed with the Declaration of Independence. The State was declared; Israel was born.

Imagine what would be today if during that hour, $3\frac{1}{2}$ years ago, the delegates at that meeting had lost heart and an old man had not asserted his courage. MAZIKIN, destruction, would rule over Israel today. There would be no Israel. Of course, in that dark bein hashmashos the decision was difficult, fraught with danger to over a million people. But the decision was right. For out of that twilight came not Demons, but a Decalogue. The State of Israel today is the result of a choice made in that twilight hour.

Tonight, my friends, is that sacred but uncertain bein hashmashos when each and every man, woman and child starts anew, unburdened by the Past, and is bidden to take a long deep look into his or her own soul and determine once and for all: which will it be, LUCHOS or MAZIKIN? A year of good or of evil; of advance or retreat; of Decalogue or Demon?

Tonight the young Rabbi who speaks to you, addresses himself as well. He knows that he is in the bein hashmashos of his life, at the dawn of a career; that he has left his studies and rabbinic training and is soon to occupy a pulpit of his own; he is between Preparation and Action; between School and Career. And I ask myself: which will I choose: LUCHOS or MAZIKIN? When I occupy my pulpit, will I sacrifice my ideals in order to please and placate others? If I believe in Kashruth and Sabbath, will I refrain from mentioning them and maintain a respectful silence because I do not want to offend the sensitivities of some of my people? In my sermons, will I let the principles perish ~~while~~ I preach the platitudes? Will I dedicate myself to the Decalogue or defer to the Demons?

Tonight there is possibly some man or woman here who is weighed down by a sense of guilt. Perhaps during the past year he ~~has~~ insulted a friend or a neighbor, an insult which on the surface is harmless but which may have caused the other person to suffer secretly in anguish. Perhaps he has besmirched someone else's reputation, which our Torah compares to *פִּנְיָה נִשְׁפָּקָה*, to spilling blood. Will he make amends to that person, or will his ego prevent him from apologizing? Will he bring a *זֶבֶח עֹלָה*, the sacrificial goat symbolizing Sin, or will he offer up a *זֶבֶח שְׂלֵמִים*, the kid offered to G-d? Will he abide by the LUCHOS, the Decalogue, or will he make way for the MAZIKIN, the Demons?

Tonight some parents may search their souls and ask: who will take over after I am gone? When the last generation passed away, we were there to carry on their tradition and heritage and faith. Who will follow us? Like Moses who wept at the funeral of his brother Aaron, crying, "When our sister Miriam died, Aaron and I were there to mourn for her. Now that Aaron is gone, I weep for him. But when I am gone, who will cry for me?" We too wonder: have we sufficiently prepared our children for full Jewish living? And what of the future: will we undertake to build and better our Day School? Will we bequeath to them LUCHOS, or will we give free reign to the MAZIKIN of ignorance and cynicism? - Decalogue or Demons?

Jewish preachers of old, those venerable Magidim, used to tell a parable which bears repetition here. An old man of Jerusalem was known over the world for his great wisdom. It was even rumored that he was as wise as Solomon. A skeptic heard of this Wise Man and decided to test him. So the Skeptic came before him, and ~~he~~ in his hands was cupped a small bird. Said the Skeptic to the Wise Man: "Tell me, if you are so wise, if the bird in my hand is dead or alive". And the Wise Man, living up to his reputation, answered: "If you close your hands, you will crush it and it will die; if you open your hands it will fly away and live".

(*) Or will I let the platitudes perish while I preach the principles?

The words of the Wise Man of that parable are addressed to us this evening. In this Twilight of a new year, the choice is in our hands and hearts: Life or Death; Good or Evil; Decalogue or Demon. Tonight we have broken those vows which linked us to the Demons of yesteryear. We must now choose for next year.

הַחַיִּים וְהַמָּוֶת הֵבֵלְנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ הַיּוֹם, הַבְרָכָה וְהַקְלָלָה ... וְאַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ

"Life and Death have I given before you this day, the blessing and the curse....and you shall choose - Life".