

It is in a dual capacity that we come to Synagogue this evening to face our Creator and implore His mercy. We come as individuals, each praying to G-d for his own welfare and the wellbeing of his loved ones and his immediate family. As individual men and women or as members of individual family groups we come to the House of G-d to ask of the Lord of the world to bestow his divine blessings upon us for this coming year. But it is also as members of a larger group that we assemble here this evening. It is as members of the Jewish people, as citizens of the holy community of Israel, <sup>we</sup> that/congregate for these Kol Nidre services.

But how much easier is it to appear in that first capacity - as individual people or as individual families. It is so much simpler, both as far as understanding and emotion are concerned, to say: "O G-d, please help me advance my business this year", or: "Dear Lord, please heal my sick mother", than it is to say, "Good G-d, please send healing to all Thy people". Not that the Jew begrudges health to his fellows - Heaven Forbid! - but since the community is more impersonal than the family or himself, he finds it difficult to put much feeling into a request of that sort. Somehow, the idea "community" is only an abstraction, an ideal in which you are interested - but it is no more than just that - an ideal or abstraction. It is more difficult to sympathize with a hungry Yemenite in Israel than with your only son who is feverishly ill in bed with a grippe.

Conversely, it is infinitely easier to accept blame or guilt as only one member of an entire people, as only part of a great community, than as an individual. I may despise the anti-semitic, but when one of these fanatics shouts, at a street corner, that all Jews are robbers, that does not bother me half as much as it would were he to single out me or my brother or family for such a stigma. It is easier to say וְאֵנָּךְ, וְאֵנָּךְ, וְאֵנָּךְ, "We were guilty, we were treacherous, we were fraudulent", than it would be to say, for instance, אֲנִי, אֲנִי, אֲנִי, "I was guilty, I was treacherous, I was fraudulent". In plain colloquial American, it is easier to pass the buck. It is easier to share the blame with others.

Yet may we enter this holy place on this Yom Kippur eve, with this surrender to the vested interests of the ego? Dare we recite *ישלחו*, "Forgive Us" with less fervor and meaning and sincerity than *יגאלנו* "We were guilty"? Dare we pray individually and confess <sup>our</sup> sins collectively? Dare we relegate ~~our~~ *our* community-consciousness to such an inferior position?

The Mishna relates the dramatic series of events which occurred in the sanctuary when it was in its full glory and majesty. The Kohen Godol, <sup>the</sup> High Priest, was the main protagonist in this holy ~~ritual~~ ritual drama, and on the day of Yom Kippur he was in the full splendor of his grandeur. *אין עין כל רואה* "Happy is the eye that saw all this!" On the night before the sacred Avodah, on Yom Kippur eve, the Kohen Godol was not permitted to sleep. For he was the representative of his people and on a holy night of this sort he must not allow the heaviness of sleep to close his eyelids. And if it happened that *אין עין כל רואה*, that the Kohen Godol would begin to drowse, the young priests would snap their fingers and call to him, "אין עין כל רואה, My Lord High Priest, stay awake on this holy night and remember your duties and obligations to the House of Israel." And to make sure that the Kohen Godol would stay awake they would read to him from the Book of Job.

Now, what was there in the Book of Job which so fired the heart and conscience of the Kohen Godol that it kept him wide awake and acutely aware of his responsibilities on this grave and solemn night? Why, of all Books, did they choose Job.

The story of the Book of Job is more or less known to all of us. It tells of this man Job who lost his wealth, became afflicted with the most devastating of oriental skin diseases, lost his family, and, bitter and dejected, eloquently complained against his bitter fate. Three friends who had come from afar to console him tried to justify the punishment that G-d meted out to Job, and the debate that ensued is one of the world's greatest discourses on Reward and Punishment, Suffering and Fate. But still we may ask - how is all this appropriate for the Kohen Godol on Yom Kippur eve?

You see, it is the beginning and end of the Book of Job that are so terribly important

*אין עין כל רואה, וזהו עין כל רואה, וזהו עין כל רואה, וזהו עין כל רואה*



And it is of this that the *פרחי כהונה*, the young priests who kept the night watch in the Temple Courts, attempted to remind the Kohen Godol. " *אֵלֵינוּ כהן גדול* Lord High Priest, how can you sleep on a night like this, how can you surrender to the inviting comfort of sleep and divorce yourself from your people on Yom Kippur eve? *אֵלֵינוּ כהן גדול*, Lord High Priest, the eyes of all of Israel are on you! Tomorrow you enter the Holy of Holies, and while you will ask for forgiveness for yourself and your family, yet your main task will be as ambassador of the entire community of Israel! *אֵלֵינוּ כהן גדול*, Lord High Priest, remember Job - family interests are insufficient even if you are *תם וישר*, even if you the High Priest of Israel! You may be troubled by your own sins, and the sins of your children who may have gone astray, but do not preoccupy yourself with your own personal affairs to the exclusion of all else. Is it not possible that these sins of you and your family are a result of your failure to sufficiently consider the great congregation of Israel? Is not the community an extension of the home and the home a miniature of the community? And, my Lord High Priest, even your prayers for yourself and your family, ~~cannot be accepted,~~ until, as Job, you pray for your friends, for your people, for all people!"

My friends, as a Rabbi I dare not underestimate the greatness and goodness of my fellow Jews. As you congregate in this holy place on this Kol Nidre eve I recognize in you a spark from the Divine Souls of the High Priests of old. For in an age when so many Jews ~~so~~ complete shirk their religious duties, when so many Jews are complete strangers ~~to~~ a synagogue, you who do come are as High Priests. I concede and affirm that you ~~are~~ *תם וישר ויכיר אלקים*, whole-hearted, righteous and G-d fearing men and women. And if perhaps I am younger than you, than allow me the privilege which the Kohen Godol of old allowed the *פרחי כהונה*, the young priests who stayed up with him on this night - the privilege of snapping my fingers and crying out *אֵלֵינוּ כהן גדול* - my dear older friends, wake up! Let us learn from Job! It is not sufficient to come here as rugged individualists, it is not <sup>even</sup> enough to come to pray for your families. Remember that you belong to a great and noble people, remember to pray in the plural, let the burden of the entire community weight upon your shoulders; be at one this holy night.

You cannot sing an oratorio by yourself, I care not how splendid your voice may be. You must merge your voice in the chorus. You cannot render the Fifth Symphony by yourself, I care not how well you may play on some single instrument. You must blend your efforts with those of an entire orchestra.

As we proceed to the Maariv Services of this holy Kol Nidre night, let each of us join his prayers with those of all the congregation and those of all of Israel. Let us merge our voices with the chorus of all of Israel's worshippers and let our thought blend with the heart-felt supplications of all the House of Jacob.

אז כל אדם חייב להגיד את האמת וכל אדם חייב לשלם את המיסים.

And, as with Job, may the Lord change our fortunes to good, and may he give us twice as much good as we had before. Amen.