

Return to Daylight

אור חדש

Defending and Restoring Liberty Under Siege

www.orhadashusa.org



"As nightfall does not come all at once, neither does oppression. In both instances, there is a twilight when everything remains seemingly unchanged. And it is in such a twilight that we all must be most aware of change in the air -- however slight -- lest we become unwitting victims of the darkness."

----- Justice William O. Douglas

Project Coordinators

Robin Braverman

Joel Siegel

rbjs@orhadashusa.org

Project Supporters

Rabbi David Cooper

Rabbi Menachem Creditor

Rabbi Roberto Graetz

Rabbi Steven Chester

Brian Schachter-Brooks

Rabbi Michelle Fisher

Rabbi Shalom Bochner

Rabbi Burt Jacobson

Rabbi Diane Elliot

Rabbi James Brandt

Cantor Ilene Keys

Rachel Biale

Rabbi Raphael W. Asher

The mission of Return to Daylight/Or Hadash USA is to build a network of Jewish Americans who:

- § are aware of their stake in democracy and democratic institutions in America,*
- § are aware of the current peril and erosion our democratic institutions face;*
- § are ready to take action in support of those institutions.*

SELECTED SOURCES ON COLLECTIVE T'SHUVAH

RABBINIC RAMBLING blog, *D'var Torah: Rosh Chodesh Elul*

Elul has been used as an acronym, stand[ing] for [*Ani L'dodi v'Dodi Li*] "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine", a direct quote from The Song of Songs and a central quote in the Jewish Wedding ceremony. Our fates are intertwined, and all of the confessions we do during this season are done in the plural. [*Ashamnu, Bagadnu, Al Chet She-chatanu, Avinu Malkeinu Chatanu*]... All of these have the *-nu* ending ... "WE have sinned" the Vidui confession, in the form of Ashamnu, Al Chet, and even Avinu Malkeinu are exclusively first person Plural. Though we may not have all committed these particular sins, all of Israel is responsible for one another. A further Elul acronym along these lines is [*Ish l're-ehu u-matanot la-eyyonim*] coming from the Scroll of Esther, "[gifts] of a man to his fellow and gifts to the poor", implying not only responsibility for the people we know and consider friends and colleagues, but also those who are destitute, to help them in this all-important time of year.

<http://matrutta.blogspot.com/2006/08/dvar-torah-rosh-chodesh-elul.html>



MyJewishLearning.com:

Included in the *Vidui* is the *Ashamnu*, which is an alphabetical acrostic of different sins we have committed. It is said in first-person plural, because while each individual may not have committed these specific sins, as a community we surely have, and our fates are intertwined on this day.

http://www.myjewishlearning.com/texts/liturgical_texts/Overview_High_Holiday_Machzor/MachzorContents_3540.htm



Art Braufman, Yom Kippur D'var Torah 5764, Congregation Netivot Shalom, Berkeley, CA

That brings us to the “Al Chet shechatanu lifanecha biyodim u’vilo yodim; for the sin which we have sinned before You knowingly and unknowingly.” Jack Reimer comments that “perhaps the real sin is knowing and not really knowing, seeing and not really seeing. We see and don’t realize what we see. We see a human being with a hand outstretched for help and we turn away, not realizing that that person is an Image of God. ...”

<http://www.netivotshalom.org/archive/drashot/members/braufmanYK5764.html>



Miriam Margles, associate rabbi at Kehillat Lev Shalem, Woodstock, NY

[The *U’netaneh tokef*] prayer, its themes and images, are a microcosm of our entire day....

The forgotten things are remembered by God, and the hidden things are seen by God. *Unetaneh tokef* opens the Book of Remembrances, *sefer hazichronot*, filled with all our deeds and thoughts. God knows, witnesses, writes, passes the verdict and seals it. The Divine Judge knows the full truth.

As we sit uncomfortably in the presence of this anthropomorphic, Big Brother sort of image, at the very same time, the prayer holds the book open for us, **and guess what? Perhaps the hardest moment of all—we see “hotam yad kol adam bo” — it is all written in our own handwriting.** Not some heavenly Father, but you yourself stand as your own damning attorney. And the truth of your life is exposed, splayed across its metaphorical pages.

I had a creative writing teacher once who said that ultimately, whether writing fiction or non-fiction, poetry or sci-fi — good writing entails telling the truth to yourself about yourself. **On Yom Kippur, we read the Book of Remembrances written on the palms of our hands, written in the recesses of our minds and the caverns of our hearts, written across the faces of people in our lives, written upon the earth we inhabit, and we tell the truth about ourselves to ourselves.**

How do we go about confronting the truth? We do so most explicitly, through the *vidui*, the confession of collective sins—tapping our hearts with each *al chet* and with each letter of the Hebrew alphabet, from *ashamnu* to *titanu*.

What I find fascinating is that at the moment of truth, at the moment of truth-telling, ... we are *not* called upon to each stand up and declare our individual and specific transgressions. We recite

a formula and we speak in the plural — *we* have lied, *we* have been stiff-necked. When our Yom Kippur liturgy was being formulated, there was debate among the rabbis over exactly this question — should confession be individual or collective? Should we be itemizing our specific wrongs or recit[ing] the same formula?

Tradition has come down on the side of a formula. We all declare the same sins, regardless of how we have acted this year. It's an interesting choice that is both protective and more demanding. In a public confession, we are being protected from the shame that so often keeps our wrongs hidden. **And we need help telling the truth, the whole truth.** ... As we tap our individual hearts, we tap our hearts awake, knocking at the protective walls of shame and defensiveness, that we are so good at building, until the walls fall down. Yes, *we* have wronged.

The collective *vidui* is also more demanding of each of us in lifting the veil off of denial... When we confess on our own, there are the things that we are more ready to admit, things that we are more conscious of, but when we are given a list and we speak these things together and in the plural, **the question has to arise — not simply have I done this one or that one, but *how have I participated in this sin, these wrongs, whether by commission or omission.*** This requires that the circles of responsibility stretch wide. You cannot drill a hole in your side of the boat and not have it affect others, and **you cannot stand by and watch things being done around you, on your behalf, in your name and remain silent without being culpable.** This is a difficult truth to swallow and so challenging to live by. But here is our liturgy and our imagery pushing to keep us honest.

So, can we handle the truth? It is uncomfortable and certainly not easy, but can we handle it?

Reproduced and presented on the website of Temple Beth Zion, Brookline, MA,
<http://www.tbzbrookline.org/prayer/high.php?id=5584&page=5584> (Some punctuation has been edited. Boldface is not in the original.)