

We have just finished the sublime Kol Nidre service, thank you Jane Shapiro, and now we come to what I hope will not be the ridiculous Kol Nidre appeal.

In the Kol Nidre service, we prospectively annul all of our individual, personal vows that we will make in the coming year. This prayer serves as our introduction to Yom Kippur. Prior to the prayer, it is not yet Yom Kippur. We have just showered, eaten, and drank 8 glasses of water. By the time Kol Nidre is said 3 times, we are all very thirsty and cannot believe that we have another 24 hours to go. This prayer serves as our transition between what we are like before Yom Kippur starts and what we are on Yom Kippur.

On Yom Kippur we try to become like the angels by separating ourselves from the physical/ rational world. We strive for a pure existence. We do this by abstaining as much as possible from the physical world for 25 hours. We don't eat, drink, bathe, or engage in sexual relations. I believe that the sages placed this Kol Nidre service at the beginning of Yom Kippur because vows are also an important way that we become more like angels. By taking a vow, we shift our life experience from the physical to the spiritual realm. An animal will do or not do something because of conditioned responses. Only a person can resolve to do or not do something as a way to connect with the divine.

Of course there is a tension here because by saying Kol Nidre we are actually annulling these vows. I believe that the Kol Nidre prayer came into existence because of the importance of vows in our religious experience and the recognition that we might tend to make vows that we can not or would not keep. Some rabbis felt that it was better to

annul these vows than to risk renegeing on one. There was great debate on the appropriateness of this prayer until the time of the crusades when Jews were forced to convert to Christianity. After that time, it became universally accepted to annul our vows as a way of disavowing the conversions.

In any event, from now until 7:00 p.m. tomorrow, many of our inward prayers and meditations consist of vows. These vows are not based on any intellectual or rational analysis, and so they also make us more like angels. They are an emotional response to our sense of awe, and by making them we can actually create a sense of awe.

This creation of a sense of awe – this attempt to connect with the divine (veohavto eit etc. and you should love the Lord your God) is really the whole purpose of religion. We are trying to take an organic, physical, and chaotic world and elevate it so that we can experience a sublime connection with God. But we are nevertheless animals. And so, Judaism recognizes that we cannot spend our lives in some meditative state seeking nirvana. Instead, we pursue the mundane tasks of life and infuse them with holiness by attaching rituals to them - Kashrut for eating, Shabbat for work, and laws of ritual purity for sexual relations.

We perform these tasks not only as individuals, but we band together as a community. This community provides for even greater sanctification than an individual can. When we say kedusha, we believe that we are actually praying with the angels. And we are

only allowed to do that when we have a minyon. This Kol Sasson community is our attempt to band together for our spiritual fulfillment to become more like angels.

Our services at Kol Sasson, like all halchik services, are grounded in the mundane, repetitive, ritualistic tasks of Judaism. On Shabbat we daven pesukai d'zimra, shacharit, and musaf and we read torah and haftora. I have been going to Shabbat morning services since I started Hebrew School at age 8, and it is an ongoing process to imbue these services and our experiences with them with spirituality. Kol Sasson does that for me, and I know that it does that for many of you as well.

How do we do it? First, we start by making sure that all the members of our community are included to the fullest extent halachically available. We include women in Torah reading, haftoras, aliyot, the torah service, and areas of our davening that are not considered tefillah such as pesukai d'zimra. We even, chas v'shalom, allow women to kiss the Torah and speak in English to the congregation. Women who were previously excluded from our services are now validated. Even those who are not leading participate and this spritual and emotional energy is felt by the whole congregation. It is felt in another way that is important to Kol Sasson – through music. Men and women raise their voices together in praise of God and the whole becomes much greater than the separate parts.

For many in the orthodox community, what we are doing here is anathema to them, and not just because they disagree with our practices. They disagree with the whole concept

of spiritual fulfillment. They practice what Hayim Solovetchik calls radical negative theology. They believe that by performing mitzvot without any concern for spiritual fulfillment, we prove our obedience to God's will and the acceptance of the divine yoke. In fact, the more onerous the mitzvah the greater is our ability to prove ourselves. That is why there is an increasing tendency in the orthodox community towards stricter interpretations.

By being different, by trying to connect spiritually, we here at Kol Sasson serve as a beacon for the entire Jewish community. We serve as a beacon not just in the general sense that we pursue a spiritually meaningful service, but as importantly in the way that we pursue our spirituality. We do so in a way that is relevant to our time and our place.

We live in a society where men and women are treated equally in all respects. Whether it be in work, civil discourse, or even religious study. Shira Hadasha in Jerusalem and eventually Kol Sasson came into existence based upon rabbinic interpretation of what is halachikally permissible, and it would be wrong and even a little bizarre to ignore these interpretations given the society in which we live. It is no longer a matter of talking about what is permissible. We must talk about what is required. The halachic concept of kavod haberyot, individual dignity, demands that we continue what we do here at Kol Sasson. Together we are doing something that has meaning not just for us, but for our community and for future generations. We are doing something here that is important. We are doing something here that has the potential for greatness.

Every great journey begins with a first step. And here are our first steps. We have instituted weekly Shabbat services and services for all the chagim; we have age appropriate children's programs whenever we have a service; we have engaged the services of Rabbi Feigleson who provides us with halachic and spiritual guidance; and most important to me, we have identified and secured future lay leadership for our congregation. You should all be proud of what we have accomplished. I know that I am.

Now we need to build on these accomplishments. We need to firmly establish Kol Sasson so that we can leave this important spiritual legacy to our children and future generations.

And that takes money. We priced our dues to allow us to function , but the revenue from these dues does not provide for our growth. And quite frankly it doesn't even cover our ongoing needs. We have many new families this year, but with the economy the way it is many families who joined in the past but only sporadically attended our services elected not to join us this year. We need your Kol Nidre appeal pledge to allow us to maintain our services **and** to provide a legacy for our future growth.

We need your money so that we can continue to bring Rabbi Feigleson here, and bring him here more often. We need your money so that we can purchase more of the seforim and ritual objects that allow us to conduct and beautify our services. We need your money so that we can pursue social action outreach. And we need your money to provide us with a cushion for our operating expenses.

You have each received a pledge card. (And if you haven't, we have extra cards that you can take home.) Each of you are founders and pioneers in this important movement and this important time in history. Your generosity has allowed us to create this community, and serves as a precious example to your children. Please take a moment to consider how important your pledge is to the future of Kol Sasson, how you would feel if Kol Sasson no longer had the funds to meet regularly, and how important it is for you to provide the same spiritually uplifting service for future generations that you are able to enjoy. Take the pledge card; and make the first vow that you make after Kol Nidre one that you will keep and one that you are proud of.

Gmar Tov.