

Rabbi Rebecca Richman

Yom Kippur 5781

Kol Nidre Intro

Kol Nidre, perhaps the most attended Jewish service of the year, is about the renunciation of oaths and vows. You may notice that this ancient legal formula, written in Aramaic, is not focused on oaths and vows we have previously made. But isn't this season of the High Holidays and the call to repentance about the year just finished? Is this day of Yom Kippur not focused on atoning for what has been done already?

It is, but Kol Nidre interestingly focuses on any oath or vow that we may make from this Yom Kippur to the next, and seeks to annul it from the start. In Jewish tradition, making oaths and vows is a big deal, and we want to protect ourselves from the risks of not carrying them out.

But there's more to Kol Nidre than the legal particulars. This opening to Yom Kippur, ancient and nostalgic, is also a spiritual call to each of us.

In *A Spiritual Guide to the High Holidays*, Simon Jacobson suggests that "renouncing 'all vows'" enables us to "break the bonds that keep [us] from traveling on the journey within" (p. 204). In other words, Kol Nidre is meant to open our hearts: Let us release ourselves and let us be released from all barriers that might block a deep, connecting experience.

"One day a year," teaches Jonathan Magonet, "we make a journey in the company of the whole community of Israel -- all of us together, each of us alone" (Machzor Lev Shalem, p. 202).

Tonight, as with all other years, we are making this journey both alone and together, only this year it is probably easier than most to feel the weight of the individual experience, as we are unable to all physically come together as a community.

Take a moment to acknowledge our separation and the power of us coming together, nonetheless, to be in our own process, in our own prayer, either alongside one another in the same room or tied together by our prayers and our hearts from one home to the next.

Together, let us journey into this day of atonement and into the realm of forgiveness, gentle as we go.