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"Yom Kippur and Tragedy: transformation and renewal through dramatic ritual and ritualistic drama."

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INTRODUCTION: YOM KIPPUR AND TRAGEDY

> "And this shall be to you a law for all time: In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall practice self-denial; and you shall do no manner of work, neither the citizen nor the alien who resides among you. For on this day atonement shall be made for you to cleanse you of all your sins; you shall be clean before the Lord. It shall be a sabbath of complete rest for you, and you shall practice self-denial; it is a law for all time." (Lev. 16:29-31)

Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, is thus ordained by the Torah as an annual occasion to release oneself from the burden of sin in order to be purified and redeemed. It is a day of ceremony; in the Temple, the High Priest was instructed to

> "put on the linen vestments, the sacral vestments. He shall purge the innermost Shrine; he shall purge the Tent of Meeting and the altar; and he shall make expiation for the priests and for all the people of the congregation" (Lev. 16:32-33).

It is a day of sacrifice; according to the book of Numbers, each person is commanded to present to the Lord "a burnt offering of pleasing odor: one bull of the herd, one ram, seven yearling lambs" (Num. 29:8). It is warned that

> "Any person who does not practice self-denial throughout that day shall be cut off from his kin; and whoever does any work throughout that day, I will cause that person to perish from among his people (Lev. 23:29-30).

The absolute solemnity of the day is clearly established. The punishment for failure to observe the prohibition against working on this day is death. It is the only time the High Priest is allowed to enter the Holy of Holies, and he is cautioned to use extreme care not to chance to look upon God's presence, which can be seen on this day in the shrine. The result of such a sighting would be his demise.

Before the destruction of the Temple, Yom Kippur was observed according to the detailed instructions of the Torah. Animals were sacrificed, and people refrained from "eating, drinking,

washing, anointing, putting on sandals, and marital intercourse."[1] After the Temple was destroyed and Jews were dispersed near and far, animal sacrifice was prohibited and organized public prayer became the way to worship God. Yom Kippur was, and continues to be, observed by fasting, confessing, and praying in the synagogue from morning to evening.

Translating concrete physical actions, such as ritual slaughter and the rites performed by the priests, into words of prayer poses problems. How can one capture the experience afforded by active participation in a ritual act when one is replacing the action with the comparatively less dynamic utterance of prayer?

The answers to these questions may lie in an examination of classical theater. Theatrical performances convey the affect of a real-life experience through simulation and spoken words. Drama is a mimetic art. The spectator is drawn, through the theatrical devices, into a different world, one in which reality is imitated and manipulated. The audience member can exist in this world for the duration of the drama and, at its conclusion, be returned to his everyday realm. If the play is effective, it can transform the spectator to the point at which he is changed by what he has viewed. A comedic play is less likely than a tragedy to elicit a serious response from the viewer. A tragedy, by definition, engages the audience member on such a deep level, that he is compelled to experience profound emotions. Aristotle refers to tragedy as

> "an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and possessing magnitude; in embellished language, each kind of which is used separately in the different parts; in the mode of action and not narrated; and effecting through pity and fear {what we call} the *catharsis* of such emotions."[2]

In other words, the spectator is purged of the severe feelings that the play draws out of him.

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[1]Phillip Goodman, *The Yom Kippur Anthology*, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1992), p. 23. Author is citing Yoma 8:1[5] from The *Babylonian Talmud*, ed. by Isidore Epstein, (London: Socino Press, 1938).

[2]*Aristotle's Poetics*, translated and with an Introduction and Notes by James Hutton, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1982), p. 50.

Greek tragedy draws from Greek mythology for its symbolism. As an art form, it evolved from the public spectacles which were Hellenistic religious rituals. Joseph Campbell, in *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, notes that

> "tragic *katharsis* (i.e., the 'purification' or 'purgation' of the emotions of the spectator of tragedy through his experience of pity and terror) corresponds to an earlier ritual *katharsis* ('a purification of the community from the taints and poisons of the past year, the old contagion of sin and death'), which was the function of the festival and mystery play of the dismembered bull-god Dionysos."[3]

The fact that the release brought about through the festival and play came to be the purpose and effect of theater reveals how necessary the experience of *catharsis* was to the ancient Greek civilization. It was so necessary that it survived the cultural evolution which transformed it from a public, participatory event into a simulation which was experienced by the audience as spectators, watching from a separate realm.

In a similar progression, Yom Kippur evolved from a ritual sacrifice and public fast, accompanied by unique rites performed by the High Priest, and became the day of prayer, confession and supplication which it is today. The spiritual purification and personal transformation which now occurs on Yom Kippur through the individual worshiper's personal journey into and through the depths of the self was originally a communal event. The effect of the journey is to grant an opportunity for renewal of the individual, and the community. The audience member of the tragedy may experience symbolic rebirth by emerging from the tragedy unfettered by the cataclysmic emotions which build up on a daily basis and interfere with a person's ability to take the risks necessary to live a full life. The worshiper experiences rebirth by returning to

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[3]Joseph Campbell, *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 26. The author is citing the preface to Aristotle, *On the Art of Poetry* (translated by Ingram Bywater, preface by Gilbert Murray, London: Oxford University Press, 1920), pp. 14-16.

his usual realm purified and in a state of spiritual cleanliness, able to live without the fears which plagued him before he entered the temporal realm of Yom Kippur and confronted them directly. The communities of the worshipers and the audience members are renewed by the infusion of greater spirits provided by the individuals who are reborn through the ritual processes of Yom Kippur and tragedy.

JEWISH HOLIDAYS AND DRAMA

The main difference between the ritualistic drama of tragedy and the dramatic ritual of Yom Kippur is that, as Michal Govrin points out in an article in Conservative Judaism, ". . . According to Aristotle, a system of means of concretization initiates another reality. . . . Judaism differs in principle with the validity of 'imitation' as a concretization of transcendental reality."[4] In other words, because the Torah expressly forbids mimetic representation of God, Jewish drama takes on a different format and character than classical theater.

Govrin gives an example of Jewish theater which shows it to be non-mimetic. She notes that the Passover Seder is a drama in which all Jews are obliged to participate.

> "The Haggadah serves as a script with stage directions, for it includes both the text which is recited during the event and the instructions for the different actions that will be performed. . . . The event occurs in the home, which has been prepared during the Passover cleaning and the burning of the leaven in order to set the proper stage for the ceremony. The main scene occurs around the table at which the participants in special costume are reclining in a special manner. Throughout the event there are predetermined accessories in use -- the seder plate, unleavened bread, the afikomen, etc. Finally, the event itself is limited in time from sundown to no later than the following sunrise.

Govrin sets up the Seder as a theatrical event, equating the various symbols of the occasion with theatrical properties, and the liturgy of the event with a theatrical script. However, she makes a clear distinction between a theatrical performance which imitates a real occurrence that is delineated in time and reproduced as it occurred, and a ritual performance which is, in effect, the "real occurrence" it purports to recreate.

> "The goal of this theatrical event is not to stage the historical exodus from Egypt. The participants do not portray the characters of Moses, Aaron, Nahshon, Yokheved, or Miriam. Through the dramatization offered by the ceremony and

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[4]Michal Govrin, "Jewish Ritual as a Genre of Sacred Theater," trans., Sue Giliford, *Conservative Judaism* 36 (3) (Spring 1983): 17.

> through recollection of the historical exodus, the participants present and live in the present moment their very own exodus, here and now, as expressed in the Haggadah: 'For ever after, in every generation, every man must think of himself as having gone forth from Egypt.'"[5]

Thus, the Seder ritual is a unique form of theater, one which follows the structure of a play, with script, stage directions, properties and the like, but at the same time, seeks not to impersonate the main characters of the story but to create a temporary realm in which all present can exist as though they were actually in attendance of the real event. So the Seder is a simulation of an a event, but it is also the event itself, revived on an annual basis.

Yom Kippur similarly allows people to experience a break from their everyday realities and enter a realm in which they exist in a liminal state. They can explore their personal flaws and vices and be purged of these through symbolic self-sacrifice. The audience member witnessing a classical tragedy undergoes this transformation through *catharsis* , and the worshiper on Yom Kippur experiences this process through separation from corporeal existence by fasting, abstaining from sexual relations, remaining in the synagogue all the time except to sleep, and confronting the hidden places of the soul. Certain customs of the day add to the sense of a state of limbo. These include the custom of dressing in white, even wearing shrouds, which reminds the worshiper that his ultimate fate must be allayed by assiduous repentance. Furthermore, during the *Aleinu* prayer, the *Shaliach Tzibur* (and in some synagogues, the worshipers themselves) fully prostrates himself before the *Aron haKodesh*, the Holy Ark, and chants the prayer lying completely prone, symbolizing his morbid state.

Theodor H. Gaster discusses Yom Kippur and its surrounding festivals as "seasonal ceremonies". He understands Yom Kippur as an austere occasion anticipating Sukkot, the festival of the autumn harvest. He notes that the Seasonal Pattern (as he calls it) is comprised of four major elements: Mortification, Purgation, Invigoration, and Jubilation. In this scheme, Rosh Hashanah would

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[5]Ibid., 27-28.

represent Mortification, a ritual "symbolizing the state of suspended animation which ensues at the end of the year, when one lease of life has drawn to a close and the next is not yet assured." Yom Kippur would be a rite of Purgation, "whereby the community seeks to rid itself of all noxiousness and contagion, both physical and moral, and of all evil influences which might impair the prosperity of the coming year and thereby threaten the desired renewal of vitality." Invigoration is explained by Gaster to be rites "whereby the community attempts, by its own concerted and regimented effort, to galvanize its moribund condition and to procure that new lease of life which is imperative for the continuance of the topocosm".[6] Gaster speaks of the original "Festival of Asif, or "Ingathering", which, he says, came to be the three separate holidays of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot. He claims that this festival included "(a) a *mimetic combat* between the god and the Dragon (or some similar adversary); (b) the triumphant procession of the divine victor and his *installation as king in a special pavilion or palace*; (c) the performance of *magical rites to stimulate rainfall and fertility*; and (d) an emphasis upon the *solar* aspects of the occasion."[7]

The modern celebration of Sukkoth incorporates these original facets in its liturgy. Like the festivals of Pesah and Shavuoth, Sukkoth has a historical connection to the Israelites' emancipation from Egypt. "Sukkoth" is the name of the place where the Israelites camped just prior to crossing the Sea of Reeds.

The "mimetic combat" to which Gaster refers is in the story of God parting the Sea of Reeds (Exodus 14:21-22), the retelling of which is an integral part of the observation of the Three Festivals. By redeeming His people from bondage by dominating the sea, God demonstrates His absolute sovereignty and honors his covenant with Israel. The recitation of Hallel on the Three Festivals proclaims the miracle of this event, particularly in Psalm 114,

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[6]Theodor H. Gaster, *Thespis: Ritual, Myth, and Drama in the Ancient Near East*, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., Anchor Books, 1961), p. 26.

[7]Ibid., pp. 64-65.

"When Israel went forth from Egypt,
the house of Jacob from a people of strange speech,
Judah became His holy one,
Israel, His dominion.
The sea saw them and fled,
Jordan ran backward,
mountains skipped like rams,
hills like sheep
What alarmed you, O sea, that you fled,
Jordan, that you ran backward,
mountains, that you skipped like rams,
hills, like sheep?" (verses 1 -6)

In this psalm, the voice telling the story changes over, in the fifth and sixth verses, from relating the events to entering the scene and directly addressing the subjects. The depiction offered in the psalm is of the landscape suddenly animated and recoiling from God's presence. By reciting Hallel on Sukkoth, worshipers are dramatizing God's domination over the elements in order to redeem His people.

Sukkoth is also the festival of pilgrimage to Jerusalem, the place in which God's Temple was established and His chosen one (David) ruled. Ismar Elbogen notes that "From the tenth century we have reliable information that on Tabernacles (Sukkoth), or at least on the seventh day, processions were held around the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem."[8] This pilgrimage, which calls to mind the original "pilgrimage" which was the Israelites' journey in the wilderness to the Promised Land, matches Gaster's description of a "triumphant procession" towards the "special pavilion or place."

In the above-cited psalm 114, the connection between the holiday and the invigoration of the people through water is indicated:

"Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord,
at the presence of the God of Jacob,
who turned the rock into a pool of water,
the flinty rock into a fountain." (verse 7)

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[8]Ismar Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History*, Raymond P. Scheindlin, Trans., (Philadelphia and Jerusalem: Jewish Publication Society and Jewish Theological Seminary, 1993), p. 116.

The reference here is to God providing water from the rock during the Israelites journey in the wilderness.[9] Also on Sukkoth the liturgy of the holiday begins to insert the plea for rain in the *Amidah* : "אתה גבור לעולם אדנ', מחיה מתים אתה, רב להושיע. משיב הרוח ומוריד הגשם"

> "You are eternally mighty, my Lord, the Resuscitator of the dead are you, abundantly able to save. He makes the wind blow and He makes the rain descend."[10]

This phrase is included from Sukkoth to Pesah, the rainy season in the land of Israel. A feeble rainfall in the winter months would lead to a paltry harvest, a morbid situation for ancient Israelites. This insert, and the piyut *Geshem* or "rain" are vestiges of an ancient rain-making ceremony which Gaster describes as follows:

> "On the first night of the festival, water was brought into the temple at Jerusalem from the neighboring pool of Siloam and was solemnly poured out upon the ground. Jewish tradition fully understood the purpose of the ceremony, putting into the mouth of God the words: 'Offer water before me on the Feast of Booths, so that the rains of the year may be blessed unto you.'"[11]

This type of ritual was originally performed for the sake of bringing about the blessing of rain for a bountiful year. Its residual presence in modern liturgy is recited for the sake of acknowledging God's providence.

The last aspect of the seasonal pattern, rites of Jubilation, ". . . bespeak men's sense of relief when the new year has indeed begun and the continuance of their own lives and that of the topocosm is thereby assured."[12] The holiday of Simhat Torah is truly the epitome of such an occasion. The name "Simhat Torah" means "Rejoicing in the Law". The festival is lighthearted and giddy, and its observance is intentionally raucous and joyful. After the stern and

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[9]Numbers 20:11.

[10]Rabbi Nosson Scherman, *The Complete Artscroll Siddur - Weekly/Sabbath/Festival*, (Brooklyn, Mesorah Publications Ltd.: 1984), pp. 98-101.

[11]Gaster, p. 66.

[12]Ibid., p. 26.

forbidding ceremonies of Yom Kippur, Simhat Torah rituals allow the release of the sobriety and tension of the high holidays. In many congregations, the prayers are recited with mock grandeur, parodying the solemnity of the Day of Atonement. It is an acknowledgment of the relief of having survived judgment that the rites of Simhat Torah can dare to make light of what was held so sacred two weeks ago. This represents the necessary adjustment of the individual to everyday life after having been reborn through the rites of Yom Kippur.

Addressing the evolution of seasonal fertility rituals of various ancient civilizations into dramatizations of the original rites, Gaster writes,

> "With the growth of urban life, however, new conceptions emerge, and the processes of nature are no longer considered so dependent upon the operations of men. When that happens, the traditional ceremonies lose their urgency and tend to survive not on account of any functional efficacy but solely by reason of their wider mythological significance and of their purely artistic appeal. Ritual then becomes subsumed in myth. The participants are no longer protagonists of a direct experience but mere actors or guisers (*personae*) reproducing an ideal or imaginary situation and impersonating characters other than themselves. Dramatic ritual then becomes drama proper"[13].

Applied to Yom Kippur, one sees how the ritual actions which made up the ceremony performed on the holiday in ancient times can be represented with proper resonance in the myth which is contained in the liturgy. In other words, the worshipers do not actually witness the High Priest performing the atonement rites, but they can invoke that experience by reciting the description of these events.

Gaster notes that "even after it had emerged from the embryonic stage and long outgrown its primitive functional purpose, Greek drama nevertheless retained the basic form and structure of its rude prototype."[14] The tragedy then, was no longer a religious ritual in and of itself, but it was the imitation of a crucial element of

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[13]Ibid., p. 83.

[14]Ibid.

such a ritual which expressed the ethics of the culture through its mythical content. By understanding how dynamic are the ritual elements embedded in the structure of a tragedy, one can understand how an audience member can be so affected by a dramatic performance. Likewise, the morbid quality which Yom Kippur possessed in Biblical times can be retained up through modern times, despite its no longer involving separate, palpable acts.

WORSHIPPER AS HERO

Joseph Campbell describes how the exploration of a vast array of diverse cultures has uncovered common elements in the myths of those cultures. According to Campbell, the symbols of mythology "are not manufactured. They cannot be ordered, invented or permanently suppressed. They are spontaneous productions of the psyche, and each bears within it, undamaged, the germ power of its source."[15] We find identical symbols in the mythologies of completely unrelated cultures. Campbell charts the symbols that crop up universally in a theoretical cycle which he refers to as the hero's journey.

The symbols and motifs which reoccur in classical tragedy are similar to those which occur in the liturgy and rituals of Yom Kippur. These also jibe with Campbell's examples of archetypal characters and symbols found in other cultural mythologies. When viewing the rituals of Yom Kippur according to Campbell's cycle, one may see clearly how some of the stages of the hero's journey are represented in Yom Kippur liturgy and rites. For example, at the outset of the journey the hero is granted "Supernatural Aid" by some other-worldly being, often the ghost of an ancestor. On Yom Kippur, as at other times, the *Mahzor* repeatedly invokes what is called "*Z'chut Avot*", or "the Merit of the Fathers". This invocation is a guarantee that even if we, as individuals, are without redeeming qualities, by virtue of the fact that we are descendants of God's covenant partners, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, we may merit forgiveness. This is an example of Supernatural Aid.

In every cultural ritual some symbols are emphasized more than others, and Yom Kippur is no exception. For example, there is a stage labeled by Campbell as "Woman as Temptress". This is an archetypal appearance of some female figure who seeks to lead the hero off his course. In the Odyssey, Circe, among several others, appears to distract Odysseus from his journey home. There is no

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[15]Campbell, p. 4.

clear cut figure who represents the "Woman as Temptress" in the liturgy of Yom Kippur. In order to discern where this symbol might appear, I truly had to make a leap in order to connect Yom Kippur to the primal story of Adam and Eve. It is possible to say that the story of Adam and Eve, wherein Eve leads Adam and herself to the original sin, eating the forbidden fruit, is so essential to the evolution of Jewish religious ethics that it is a clear part of the backdrop of Jewish myth, against which Yom Kippur takes place. By uncovering the knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Eve, and through them, all mankind, are now free to choose to be good or evil. Hence, the capacity to sin and to repent becomes the central part of human nature. This story is retold as part of the *Seder Avodah* in *Musaf*, which recalls the creation of the world and refers to Eve as "אולת", "a foolish woman" who was punished for her part in the "seduction" that led Adam astray.[16] Aside from this reference which aims to place the Temple Service in the context of the creation of the world, there is no obvious connection to the story of Adam and Eve.

This paper will delve into those archetypal symbols which are most emphasized by the unique character of Yom Kippur. By using Campbell's work as a guideline for understanding what is represented psychologically and culturally by Yom Kippur's rites and comparing them to what is represented by the elements of tragedy, it requires not much of a stretch to understand how the two apparently different events actually accomplish similar personal and societal goals.

16*The Complete Artscroll Machzor (Yom Kippur)*, Rabbi Nosson Scherman and Meir Zlotowitz, eds. (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, Ltd., 1986), pp. 556-557.

SHOFAROT, THE CALL TO ADVENTURE

When seen in the context of Campbell's hero cycle as charted in *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, the worshiper is seen to demonstrate all of the same qualities and undergoes all of the same processes as any other archetypal hero from any other cultural ritual or legend, including the Greek tragedy. To begin with, all heroes are summoned, with appropriate fanfare and ceremony, by what Campbell labels the "Call to Adventure".[17] It may occur internally through some desire to attempt a heroic action, as in the case of Theseus in Greek mythology. When Theseus arrived in Athens and discovered the horror caused by the Minotaur, he was impelled to do something about it. The Call may also be sounded by external natural or God-like forces, as in the *Odyssey* of Homer, where Poseidon, angered by Odysseus' murder of his son, blew the winds against his vessel and kept him at sea for so many years. In Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, the Call comes in the form of the Weird Sisters who appear in the forest and address Macbeth as though his kingship was already a fact. Their appearance prompts Macbeth to pursue his bloody course to the throne. In many bible stories, the Call to Adventure is simply a direct summons from God to take action. Witness Abraham being summoned by God in Genesis 12:1, "The Lord said to Abram, 'Go forth from your native land and from your father's house to the land that I will show you.'" To Moses, the Call was the appearance of a Burning Bush, and from it the voice of God telling Moses to go to Pharaoh and obtain the freedom of the Israelite slaves.

The Call to Adventure for the worshiper on Yom Kippur actually occurs the week before, on Rosh Hashanah. The *Shofar* is sounded and the worshiper is reminded that the time for *Teshuvah*, "repentance" has come:

> "Arise from your slumber, you who are asleep; wake up from your deep sleep, you who are fast asleep; search your deeds and repent; remember your Creator. Those of you who forget the truth because of passing vanities, indulging

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[17]Campbell, p. 58.

> throughout the year in the useless things that cannot profit you nor save you, look into your souls, amend your ways and deeds. Let everyone give up his evil way and his bad purpose."[18]

He may choose to ignore the call, which would be a denial of the opportunity for renewal. To do so would be courting death, as the *Shofar* is a symbol of judgment, and anyone who is judged unfavorably will command a mortal punishment. On the other hand, the Shofar is also an artifact which reminds us of the divine mercy shown to Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah. Because it is made of a Ram's horn, it evokes the appearance of the ram in the thicket which was the substitute sacrifice offering God provided to take the place of Isaac.[19]

There are a few overt references to the *Akeda*, the story of the binding of Isaac, in Rosh Hashanah liturgy. It is the prescribed Torah reading for the second day of Rosh Hashanah. It is also referred to in the *Zichronot* section of the *Hazzan's* repetition of the Rosh Hashanah *Musaf Amidah*,

> "Let there appear before You the Akeidah when Abraham, our father, bound Isaac, his son, upon the altar and he suppressed his mercy to do Your will wholeheartedly. So may Your mercy suppress Your anger from upon us"[20]

It is no coincidence that the story of Isaac's near-death encounter is connected to the rituals of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the time in which each Jew confronts the possibility of his or her own death by understanding the mortal consequences of his or her actions. For the worshiper offers himself as a sacrifice on Yom Kippur, acknowledging that his deeds command a mortal punishment. The awareness that God is merciful, evidenced by the sparing of Isaac on Mount Moriah, is the factor which allows the worshiper to make that self-sacrifice with the confidence that the

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[18]Maimonides, *Hilkhot Teshuvah*, 3:4. *Maimonides' Mishneh Torah*, ed. and trans. by Phillip Birnbaum, (New York: Hebrew Publishing Co., 1967), p. 38.

[19]Genesis 22:13

[20]Nosson Scherman, *The Complete ArtScroll Machzor (Rosh Hashanah)*, (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 1985), p. 515.

fate which awaits him by doing so is a better one than what he would have merited had he not repented.

The story of the binding of Isaac is about as dramatic a tale as any contained in Jewish lore. It is the ultimate act of depravity for a father to murder his son, yet the willingness to do so without questioning God's command makes Abraham a devoted and pious hero in our tradition's eyes. It was difficult for early reformers to understand why this portion should be read aloud on Rosh Hashanah. Many reform congregations chose not to read this at all and instead read the first day's portion or another entirely different portion altogether. Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman, in *Gates of Understanding*, looks at the different explanations for the designation of this portion for Rosh Hashanah. He points out that one reason often given is that this portion "dramatizes the transition in the history of religion from human to animal sacrifice".[21] Hoffman finds this answer less than conclusive and insufficient in explaining why this story has been and is compelling to Jews through the ages.

Hoffman suggests that one way to look at the *Akeda* story is to try to understand it from a psychological point of view, as an exploration of relationships between parent and child. Although Hoffman continues by examining Abraham's psyche, I would look at the episode from Isaac's perspective and suggest that Abraham can be seen as embodying the castrating father. Abraham, at the command of God, has instituted the practice of circumcision, on himself, Ishmael and Isaac. Now he brings Isaac to an altar to be sacrificed, also at the command of God. It is not only Abraham who is being tested, but surely, Isaac as well. Campbell documents the existence of rites of passage which include circumcision, castration and ritual sacrifice of young boys. He attributes their prevalence to an "archetypal nightmare of the ogre father (which) is made actual in the ordeals of primitive initiation."[22] The lesser of these rituals, circumcision, affords the society a way in which to exorcise these

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[21]Lawrence A. Hoffman, *Gates of Understanding II*, (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1984), p. 92.

[22]Campbell, p. 137.

cataclysmic fears by acting out the feared event on an acceptable scale. By channeling the father's murderous impulses and the son's castration fears into a symbolic enactment, both parties may enter into the fire and emerge unscathed and able to move forward with their lives, unfettered by the primal terrors which previously bound them.

The parallel story in classical tragedy is Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*. In this myth, Oedipus' father is warned that his son is destined to kill him, so he sends Oedipus off to be murdered as an infant. Oedipus' life is spared, and he ends up unwittingly killing his father and marrying his mother. The psychological impetus for the creation and propagation of such a legend is that all children enter a stage of early childhood in which they wish that they could replace the parent of their gender. This is a normal fantasy which reflects the deep and complex attachment and fear of separation that children feel toward their parents. The tale of Oedipus realizes these emotions on a tragic scale, elevating them to catastrophic status. *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the drama, allows an audience to experience this catastrophe and recognize their own worst fears exposed. At the conclusion, the characters in the play die but the lives of the audience members are spared, and they are free to leave these fears behind when they exit the theater. The effect on society as a whole is that, because its members have an acceptable outlet for aggressive emotions and inclinations which are taboo, these forbidden impulses need not seek expression in real life. Thus civil order is maintained amid the chaos of human emotions. Surely, the reading of the Akeda on Rosh Hashanah provides a similar outlet for worshipers.

With a different view of the story and its significance, the connection between the Shofar and the story of the *Akeda*, the binding of Isaac is mentioned in Max Artz's book *Justice and Mercy*. Artz discusses the plea תקע בשופר גדול, "When seated on Thy judgment throne, hearken to the sound of the *Shofar*". Artz comments,

> "This plea, that God may listen to the *shofar* sounds and spare the world, is in effect a beseeching that the Judge of all men may temper justice with mercy. We invoke the merit of the patriarchs and the covenant made with them. The binding of Isaac is recalled as an example of true

> dedication to God and as a reminder of the special merit accruing therefrom to his descendants."[23]

In other words, just as we are obliged to take notice of the story of the *Akeda*, so too do we ask God to remember what our ancestors did in their devotion to Him. For their sake, we plead that He should ascribe worthiness to our lives, that we may benefit from the same mercy He showed to Abraham and Isaac.

23Max Arzt, *Justice and Mercy*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1963), p. 164.

JONAH, "IN THE BELLY OF THE WHALE"

On Yom Kippur, the *Maftir* in the *Minchah* service is the story of Jonah. It begins, "And the word of God came to Jonah son of Amittai saying: 'Arise! Go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against her, for their wickedness has ascended before me.'"[24] Jonah fails to respond affirmatively to God's command and instead, tries to flee "from before God's presence"[25] by boarding a ship at Jaffa. This attempt to resist the Call to Adventure is aptly termed "Refusal of the Call".[26] It represents an attempt to avoid one's fate. In psychological terms, to do so is to remain fixated in an infantile world, so fearful of the consequences of action that one is paralyzed and unable to grow.

In Jonah's case, God does not allow him to resist. In a demonstration of His absolute control, He causes a storm to besiege the ship. Jonah, recognizing that this is God's response to his flight, beseeches the sailors to toss him overboard. He is promptly swallowed by a Leviathan. Inside the beast, Jonah exists in limbo. He should be dead, but he is given the opportunity to be born again. This episode is so compelling that Campbell labels an entire stage of the hero's journey after it. In the section entitled "The Belly of the Whale" he writes,

> "The idea that the passage of the magical threshold is a transit into a sphere of rebirth is symbolized in the worldwide womb image of the belly of the whale. The hero, instead of conquering or conciliating the power of the threshold, is swallowed into the unknown, and would appear to have died."[27]

Having been plucked out of the raging sea and deposited into the stomach of the Leviathan, Jonah is spared by God from certain death. By virtue of this reprieve, he is separated from the sphere of humanity. At this point he is free from thinking the way he would think in his usual realm. He had sought to avoid prophesying doom

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[24]Jonah, 1:1-2.
[25]Jonah, 1:3.
[26]Campbell, p. 59.
[27]Ibid., p. 90.

to Nineveh by fleeing God. He declined to obey God's command because he feared that by proclaiming that Nineveh would be destroyed for the evil ways of its inhabitants, he would appear to be a false prophet when the All-Merciful accepted the repentance of those inhabitants. To Jonah, his earthly status among men was more valuable than the lives of the people in Nineveh. This is why he sought to avoid fulfilling God's command. By doing so, he was denying his own essence, contained in his name, "Ben-Amittai", literally, "son of my truth".[28] Jonah was born to prophesy. It was up to him to confirm his calling by speaking God's word to the people of Nineveh, even if it would make him seem to be untruthful. In the belly of the whale, Jonah understands that the opinions of human beings are ultimately meaningless and the judgment of God is supreme. He is able then cast off his worldly aspirations in order to undergo his transformation into a true servant of God.

The symbol of the inner realm wherein a hero may undergo the sort of transformation which leads to rebirth is a common motif. In Greek Mythology, Kronos swallows all of his children except Zeus in order to prevent them from overthrowing him. Once they are vomited out of him, they may ascend to their rightful places as the ruling deities on Mount Olympus. The most famous hero of Greek lore, Herakles, dove into the mouth of the water monster with which Poseidon had been terrorizing the shores of Troy. Once inside, Herakles cut the beast's belly open and emerged, having killed his predator. The hero must enter the beast and become part of it in order to take on its power. To achieve greatness, the hero must risk everything for the chance to become something more than what he is.

For Jonah, the Belly of the Whale symbolizes a sanctuary in which he may acknowledge the death of the old Jonah and praise God for his redemption. As Campbell writes,

> "The disappearance (into the beast) corresponds to the passing of a worshiper into a temple--where he is to be quickened by the recollection of who and what he is, namely dust and ashes unless immortal. The temple interior, the

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[28] *The Complete Artscroll Machzor (Yom Kippur)*, p. 635.

> belly of the whale, and the heavenly land beyond, above and below the confines of the world, are one and the same."[29]

In this temple, Jonah is undergoing a metamorphosis. He is like a fetus in a womb, not yet a baby, no longer an embryo. He is safe in the sanctuary of the "World Womb", as Campbell calls it, but he cannot stay there forever; he must be expelled back into the realm which he left behind. Similarly, the worshiper on Yom Kippur is safe within the physical boundaries of the synagogue and the time-period that is the duration of the holy day. Once the day is over and the gates of repentance close, the worshiper, too, must be transported back to his everyday realm. The awesome revelation which occurs through this transformative process is that the world stays the same, and only the self changes. In other words, there is no supernatural destination at which the hero will arrive; rather, in the journey lies the magic.

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[29]Campbell, pp. 91-92.

KOL NIDRE: CROSSING OF THE FIRST THRESHOLD

For centuries, *Kol Nidre* was problematic for the Jews. It is the commencement for the holiest of holy days, yet it is phrased in dispassionate legal terms. Furthermore, the melody to which it is set is uniquely poignant and stirring. At a workshop on High Holiday music at Temple Beth Torah in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, I asked congregants to tell what was the highlight of the High Holidays for them, personally. The first respondent said, "*Kol Nidre*. To me, that *is* the High Holidays. "[30] Others nodded in agreement. When I asked them to explain why this prayer was so meaningful to them, they were unable to pin down a response. This sort of enigmatic, popular attachment to this dry prosaic formula is the reason for *Kol Nidre*'s survival as a crucial liturgical element of Yom Kippur. Many authorities were critical of the invocation of *Kol Nidre* by the masses. The earliest mention of the custom appears in *Seder Amram Gaon*, a ninth-century compilation of Jewish liturgy. Amram notes that the practice exists, but he refers to it as "מנהג שטות", a "foolish custom".[31] Despite official attempts to eliminate the recitation of *Kol Nidre*, Jews clung to it as an indispensable initiation of Yom Kippur.

Shlomo Deshen of Tel Aviv University wrote that "Ordinary people throughout the ages have sensed that the rabbinical authorities formal reservations to the *Kol Nidre* custom (and the *Kapparot* custom) were off the mark. Intuitively they felt that the customs were deeply anchored in the essence of the Day of Atonement, and this factor weighed more heavily on them than the rabbinical reservations.[32] This popular perception of *Kol Nidre*. as a key part of the ritual of Yom Kippur led to the custom continuing to this day.

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[30]Holiday workshop led by the author at Temple Beth Torah, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on September 17, 1995.

[31]*Seder Rav Amram Gaon*, Daniel Goldschmidt, Ed., (Jerusalem, Mossad ha-Rav Kook: 1971), קסג - קסב.

[32]Shlomo Deshen, "The Kol Nidre Enigma: An Anthropological View of the Day of Atonement Liturgy" Ethnology 18 (1979) 131-132.

Deshen has attempted to explain why this seemingly incongruously incorporated ritual is held so dear to Jews all over the world. First, he notes that Yom Kippur is a Transition Rite, one which allows for the transcendence of daily life; it grants "man a temporary release from the social structure that normally governs his life."[33] By releasing man from his societal role, *Kol Nidre* grants him the freedom to examine the contradictions of life and come to the realization that such contradictions are reconcilable. Furthermore, the worshiper is shown that, unlike a tragic hero whose flaw leads to a direct descent into total destruction, he may be redeemed from his misdeeds by repentance. *Kol Nidre*'s renunciation of all vows symbolizes the power of repentance to annul harsh judgment.

Next, Deshen labels *Kol Nidre* a rite of separation. He notes that the rites surrounding its recitation relate to the disengagement from worldly pursuits. There are, in addition, numerous references to death in the liturgy and customs of Yom Kippur. Deshen discusses one such rite, *Kapparot*, in which the worshiper swings a fowl around his or her head and recites the following formula: "This is my substitute, this is my change, this is my redemption. This rooster will go to its death, and I shall be admitted to a good and peaceful life."[34] This custom indicates that the worshiper is presumably supposed to die, but is enabled to live by offering the death of the fowl as his substitute. Deshen writes,

> "Progressing into the liturgy of the Day of Atonement, the worshiper continues to associate repentance with a positive view of death. This is highly suited to the essence of the Day of Atonement as a transition rite in which man sheds his earthly characteristics and dwells in the sphere of the ultimate, in total purity."[35]

By viewing its text and performance as a necessary step in the process of detaching oneself from one's environment in order to be transformed, he has revealed that the recitation of *Kol Nidre* at the start of the Day of Atonement is absolutely relevant.

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[33]Ibid., 124.
[34]Ibid., 130.
[35]Ibid., 129.

Yom Kippur and classical tragedy both serve the same purpose: to provide a transformative experience to the participant (worshiper or audience member) by effecting a symbolic encounter with death and rebirth. For one viewing a tragedy, the encounter with death comes through *Catharsis*. By becoming absorbed in the plot and identifying with the characters, one may live and die vicariously through them. For the worshiper on Yom Kippur, the encounter is effected through relinquishing everyday pursuits and temporarily abandoning human relations. By beginning the Day of Atonement with the sacrificial ritual of *Kapparot* and the symbolic breaking of human relations by reciting the *Kol Nidre* formula, the worshiper is thus allowed to get down to the business of repentance without fear of the outcome. He has already symbolically enacted the worst-case scenario, his own death. Through fasting, he denies the vital drives of his physical being. By wearing white, he displays his preparedness to be buried. When he renounces his vows, he relinquishes human contractual relations. Now, nothing can interfere with his quest for atonement, or as Campbell would suggest, "at-one-ment," with God:

> "Atonement (at-one-ment) consists in no more than the abandonment of that self-generated double monster--the dragon thought to be God (super-ego) and the dragon thought to be Sin (repressed id). But this requires an abandonment of the attachment to ego itself, and that is what is difficult. One must have a faith that the father is merciful, and then a reliance on that mercy."[36]

Having garnered faith in God's mercy during the Days of Awe (thanks to the Shofar Call on Rosh Hashanah -- see above "SHOFAROT"), the worshiper may abandon himself in order to achieve this harmonious state. The rites of Kol Nidre symbolize this abandonment which is the "Crossing of the First Threshold." Campbell explains that "the crossing of the threshold is the first step into the sacred zone of the universal source."[37] In the Temple, the sacred zone of the universal source is the Holy of Holies, wherein the very presence of God may

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[36]Campbell, p. 130.

[37]Ibid., p. 81.

be revealed. After the Temple, worshipers themselves may be admitted to the spiritual zone of the universal source by adhering their own entities to God.

The significance of the passage through the First Threshold is that simply overcoming the fear which had, to this moment, held the hero back from attempting to pass through to the realm of the unknown, is, in fact, the threshold itself.

> "One had better not challenge the watcher of the established bounds. And yet--it is only by advancing beyond those bounds, . . . that the individual passes . . . into a new zone of experience. . . . The adventure is always and everywhere a passage beyond the veil of the known into the unknown; the powers that watch at the boundary are dangerous; to deal with them is risky; yet for anyone with competence and courage the danger fades."[38]

By performing the self-sacrifice necessary to be regenerated, (i.e., forsaking the familiar realm), the hero demonstrates his heroic qualities.

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[38]Ibid., p. 82.

UNETANE TOKEF: JUSTICE AND MERCY

According to Northrop Frye, classical tragedy "...seems to lead up to an epiphany of law, of that which is and must be"[39]. In other words, the tragic outcome is a proof of the silent workings of that which controls the universe, whether that force is called Nature, God, or Fate. The essential element shared by both tragedy and Yom Kippur lore is the preponderance of Justice. The difference between the two forms is the necessary presence of Mercy in Yom Kippur and its necessary absence in tragedy. If it weren't for the opportunity to invoke God's mercy upon oneself through "repentance, prayer and charity," Yom Kippur would offer no redemption, only death sentences for all. For, as the liturgy tells us, there is none among us so arrogant and stiff-necked to say he hasn't sinned. On Yom Kippur a worshiper may receive mercy only through acknowledgment of sin. The Confession is as imperative to the process of repentance as "recognition" is to the process of classical tragedy. The tragic hero must have a moment of awareness in which he realizes what he has done to deserve his fate. Without this awareness, there is no lesson learned, no connection between the action and the consequence. This is what makes the drama a tragedy.

In tragedy, as opposed to Yom Kippur, once the wheels of fate begin to turn, there is no stopping them. There is no redemption for the tragic hero in the recognition of the deed, only redemption for the audience member who can suffer vicariously through the tragic hero and gain the wisdom from his experience in order to avoid incurring the same fate. On Yom Kippur, however, it is never too late to repent. Confronting his misdeeds and flaws is not the end of the road for the worshiper, rather it is the key to receiving forgiveness. This is what makes the Yom Kippur observance a tragedy narrowly averted. One may find this unique combination of Justice and Mercy described in the text of *Unetane Tokef.*

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[39]Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, (New York: Atheneum, 1967), p.208.

The Artscroll Machzor discusses *Unetaneh Tokef* as having originated in the eleventh century in Mainz. It tells the story of one Rabbi Amnon who was asked to convert by his friend, the Bishop of Mainz. Amnon's response was to ask for three days to consider the matter. When he returned home, he was overcome with regret that he had even implied that he might betray his faith and his God. After the grace period was up, the bishop summoned him and demanded his reply. Rabbi Amnon said that his own tongue should be cut out for the sin of saying he would consider conversion. The bishop said his sin was not in speaking, but in not coming forth as he had promised, and thus ordered his feet and hands chopped off, joint by joint. He paused after each joint to ask for the Rabbi's conversion, which he refused to give. The Rabbi was sent home with his body parts. A few days later, Rosh Hashanah arrived and Rabbi Amnon asked to be carried to the Ark. Before the recitation of *Kedusha*, he asked to be allowed to sanctify God's name. He recited *Unetaneh Tokef* and then died.[40]

Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman, in Gates of Understanding II, ascribes this tale to popular legend based on true historical circumstances. He believes that it more likely can be traced to the Byzantine Christian *paytan* Romanus, who wrote a poem quite similar to *Unetaneh Tokef*.[41] Whatever the source for this poem's creation, its use throughout Jewish History as the significant addition to *Kedushat HaShem* in *Musaf* Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur confirms the power of its message of imminent mortality and the resonance of its unique portrayal of God on the High Holidays.

In considering the language and symbolism of the text itself, many interesting elements are uncovered. First, the prayer initiates the "*Kedushat HaShem*" section of the *Amidah* which sanctifies God's name, but its opening line is "ונתנה תקף קדשת היום" "Let us now relate the power of this *day's* holiness"[42], a phrase more apt to be found in the "*Kedushat Hayom*" section which expresses the sanctity

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[40]Scherman, 1985, pp. 480-481.

[41]Hoffman, pp. 76-77.

[42]*The Complete Artscroll Machzor(Yom Kippur)*, p. 531.

of the holy day. As the text goes on, it is evident that the power of the day is derived from it being the day in which God's sovereignty will be established:

"כי הוא נורא ואיום. ובו תנשא מלכותך. ויכון בחסד כסאך. ותשב עליו באמת."

"...for it is awesome and frightening. On it Your Kingship shall be exalted; Your throne will be firmed with kindness and You will sit upon it in truth."

This opening line juxtaposes the format of an official announcement with a spiritual dimension of such an emotional character as to be not only awesome, but also frightening. One may visualize a meeting being called to order with a very deliberate, pre-determined procedure (i.e., in order to get started with the business, the agenda must first be officially announced.) But what seem incongruous for their high drama are the words "awesome" and "frightening". Incongruous, except for the fact that the quorum reciting the phrase is a minyan gathered for religious worship and the purpose of the day is to plead for one's very life.

The wording of the Unetaneh Tokef is fascinating because it imparts a legalistic aspect to the ritual of its recitation. In the opening phrase, the Congregation and Hazzan chant "Let us now relate the power of this day's holiness, for it is awesome and frightening". [43] The piyut continues, "On it Your Kingship will be exalted: Your throne will be firmed with kindness and You will sit upon it in truth." The combination of kindness and truth as the backdrop of God's rule makes for a hopeful image to a worshiper standing as a defendant before this holy court. As Artscroll points out in its notes, God desires the repentance of a sinner so that He can reverse a severe judgment. Thus there is a conflict between the immutable truth and the kindness that God would bring to His sentencing. Because God's mercy supersedes the inflexibility of judgment, God's supremacy is confirmed when he overrides the sentence.[44]

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[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid.

The word "אמת" "truth" is repeated, emphasizing the notion that the truth is known before God, who is described as "the One who judges, proves, knows and bears witness, counts, calculates and remembers all that is forgotten." The prayer goes on to present the concept that God opens the Book of Remembrances, which "reads itself", and in it, "the seal of every man's hand is set thereto"[45]. This is a fascinating description because it contrasts the long list of roles which God plays (Judge, prosecutor, all-knowing, witness, etc.) with the role which Man plays, i.e. recorder of his own deeds.[46] In other words, despite the apparent monopoly on justice which God possesses, it is still the individual, and not God, who decides and decrees his or her own fate.

The next set of contrasting images is clear: "ובשופר גדול יתקע וקול דממה דקה ישמע" "The great Shofar will be sounded and a still, thin sound will be heard". The expression "great Shofar" recalls the description of the Messianic age described in Isaiah, 27:13, "And it shall come to pass in that day, that a great horn shall be blown; and they shall come that were lost in the land of Assyria, and they that were dispersed in the land of Egypt; and they shall worship the Lord in the holy mountain at Jerusalem." This reinforces the linkage between the much-feared Day of Judgment and the much-longed-for In-gathering of the Exiles. Also represented by the "great Shofar" is the Akeda, a story which reveals God's mercy, as explained above.

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[45]Arzt, p.169.

[46]Rabbi Margaret Moers Wenig, (Hebrew Union College "High Holiday Liturgy" Class discussion, 11/28/94, New York). The interpretation of the phrase "חותם יד כל אדם בו" offered in this thesis is by no means a conclusive, literal translation. It is most influenced by the translation from *Gates of Repentance* : "the signature of every human being." (GOR, p. 107). *Artscroll Mahzor* comments, "When God records deeds, they are verified as clearly as if each perpetrator had signed them (*cf Job 37:7*). (*Artscroll*, p. 531). The citation from Job reads:

(His mighty downpour of rain,)
is as a sign on every man's hand,
That all men may know His doings. (Job, 37:6-7).

The "still, thin sound" is a reference to God's appearance to Elijah in I Kings 19:12. "When Elijah was told that God would appear to him, he felt a powerful wind, heard a resounding noise, and saw a flame, but God was in none of them. Then he heard a *still, thin, sound*, and it was that which signified that God had appeared.[47] *Gates of Repentance* translates וקול דממה דקה as "the still, small voice".[48] The creative interpretation of this phrase which I favor, personally, allows that the still, small voice heard after the great *Shofar* is the voice of conscience which is sounded in the ears of all penitents. The apocalyptic grandeur of the trumpet blast which heralds the Day of Judgment is no more compelling than the plaintive speech of the self. For it is from within that one confesses. An indictment from a heavenly court will not bring about repentance, only the honest assessment of the heart and soul of the sinner.

The next image conjured by the text is that of angels crying in terror "Behold, it is the Day of Judgment, to muster the heavenly hosts for judgment!" The prayer explains that they are racing around in fear because "they cannot be vindicated in Your eyes in Judgment". Their only hope for salvation is through the redemption of Israel, since "the entire universe was created for the sake of Israel, the nation that would accept the Torah."[49]

> The last motif of *Unetaneh Tokef*'s first section visualizes that "all mankind will pass before You like members of the flock. Like a shepherd pasturing his flock, making sheep pass under his staff, so shall You cause to pass, count, calculate, and consider the soul of all the living; and You shall apportion the fixed needs of all Your creatures and inscribe their verdict."

This is a strikingly hopeful view of judgment. God is portrayed as a shepherd, insuring that all his sheep are tended appropriately and accounted for. Sheep are animals who require tending or else they go astray. If a member of the flock strays, it is the responsibility of

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[47]*The Complete Artscroll Machzor*, p. 531.

[48]*Gates of Repentance*, Chaim Stern, ed., (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1978), p. 107.

[49]*The Complete Artscroll Machzor*, p. 532.

the shepherd to bring it back to the fold. By viewing God as the shepherd and man as the flock, the onus of return is placed on God and not on mankind. This is in stark contrast to the view that man has the freedom to sin of his own volition and to return in repentance of his own volition. To be sure, the Hebrew phrase "מרון כבנ'" is not translated literally. There is debate as to what the expression means. But the poetic translation offered here by *Artscroll* is generally accepted as meaningful to the *piyut* , especially in light of the following phrase, "רועה עדרו, מעביר צאנו תחת שבטו כבקרת", which unequivocally refers to a shepherd pasturing his flock, causing them to pass under his staff.

The next section of *Unetaneh Tokef* begins, "On Rosh Hashanah will be inscribed and on Yom Kippur will be sealed how many will pass from the earth and how many will be created; who will live and who will die." The prayer then enumerates the horrible ways in which people will meet their ends. This depressing litany continues until the last five phrases which are ameliorated by offering positive fates as well ("Who will rest and who will wander, . . . who will be degraded and who will be exalted.")

This section, referred to as *B'rosh Hashannah*, is an outright warning to the worshiper, explicitly describing the possible consequences of the day. As he peruses the sanctuary, the worshiper notices that there are some empty places which had been filled last year at this time. He notes the unpredictability of life and how quickly fortunes change from one year to the next. *B'rosh Hashannah* emphasizes this impression, and gives the explanation that people's fates are directly related to their actions on Rosh Hashannah and Yom Kippur.

The conclusion of this section provides the formula for reprieve, the *essence of Yom Kippur*:

"ותשובה ותפלה וצדקה מעבירין את רע הגזרה"

"But repentance, prayer and charity remove the evil of the decree!"

After *B'rosh Hashannah* comes the section known as *Ki K'shimcha*. This is the most lyrical part of *Unetaneh Tokef* and it offers a wholly merciful view of God, in contrast to *B'rosh Hashannah*:

> "For Your Name signifies Your praise: hard to anger and easy to appease, for You do not wish the death of one deserving death, but that he repent from his way and live. Until the day of his death You await him; if he repents You will accept him immediately."

This comforts those appalled by the description of death in the previous section and seeks to encourage repentance by allaying the fears one might have that one's attempt at *t'shuvah* might be rebuffed.

The prayer continues,

> "It is true that You are their Creator and You know their inclination, for they are flesh and blood. A man's origin is from dust and his destiny is back to dust, at risk of his life he earns his bread; he is likened to a broken shard, withering grass, a fading flower, a passing shade, a dissipating cloud, a blowing wind, flying dust, and a fleeting dream."

Here the prayer reminds God that people are only as much as He made them to be. This assigns a degree of responsibility for man's misdeeds to his Creator. It also serves to instill humility in the worshiper by poetically emphasizing the tenuous nature of his existence. In reverence, the entire *Unetaneh Tokef* concludes: "**But You are the King, the living and enduring God.**"

One might wonder why the congregation needs to recite the *Unetaneh Tokef*. Is it possible to infer that if they did not make mention of the day's power, then the power would cease to be? Without the Days of Awe, would the Jewish people take the time and effort out of their everyday lives to examine their souls and seek repentance? These questions cut to the heart of the reason for marking such occasions as Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah. As individuals grow older, they are aware of how time passes easily without many opportunities to reflect on one's life. It seems to be inherent in humankind's nature to seek meaning and redemption in life. Usually this search stems from an awareness of one's impending demise. Since all human beings die and are aware that their days are numbered, it is not surprising that mythologies and rituals exist in every known culture which seek to explain the mysteries of life and death and to impart meaning to those who would seek it.

Judaism's conception of redemption and affirmation of life in the face of mortality combines a depiction of God as the all-knowing judge and executioner, who gives life and can take it away just as easily, with a belief that all human beings control their own destinies by the way they behave towards one another. This is an effective explanation of why suffering occurs and a motivating force to coerce people to act mercifully toward one another. *Unetaneh Tokef* could not be complete without the mitigating phrase, "But repentance, prayer and charity remove the evil of the decree".

CONCLUSION: A GLIMPSE OF GREATNESS

The genre of tragedy includes a mimesis of sacrifice.[50] The tragic hero is offered up to appease some unnamed force whose power and law are confirmed by the fall of the hero. Through the death of the tragic figure, those who participate in the ritual are saved from meeting the same end. Frye explains,

> "As a mimesis of ritual, the tragic hero is not really killed or eaten, but the corresponding thing in art still takes place, a vision of death which draws the survivors into a new unity."[51]

This view of tragedy as offering a "vision of death" is precisely the view which allows for comparison with the rites of Yom Kippur. Fortunately, those not pious enough to repent do not spontaneously combust at the conclusion of *Neila*, neither do we believe, when someone dies, that he or she was incurring divine retribution. However, the awareness of death through its evocation in the *B'Rosh Hashanah* section of *Unetaneh Tokef* and in the recitation of the martyrology section in the *Minha* service, allows worshipers on Yom Kippur, like the audience witnessing a tragedy, to participate in *a vision of death which draws the survivors into a new unity* . This new unity is the purpose of both rituals -- Yom Kippur and tragedy. The public at large benefits from the individual self-sacrifice which occurs during these two events. Presumably, after confronting the mortal consequences brought on by anti-social (sinful) behavior, one will emerge from the Synagogue or the theater recommitted to pious, lawful living.

Frye continues on the subject of tragedy:

> "As a mimesis of dream, the inscrutable tragic hero, like the proud and silent swan, becomes articulate at the point of his death, and the audience, like the poet in *Kubla Khan*, revives his song within itself. With his fall, a greater world beyond which his gigantic spirit had blocked out becomes for an instant visible, but there is also a sense of the mystery and remoteness of that world."

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[50] Frye, p. 215.

[51] Ibid., pp. 215-216.

The tragic hero's death is the vehicle for the renewal of the audience member's life. In order for the audience to receive the insight and elevation which comes from comprehension of the process which the hero has undergone, that hero must be sacrificed, or else he ceases to be a hero.

The same is true for the worshiper on the Day of Atonement. He must allow his old self (the self bound by fears which begins the journey) to die in order for his new self (the self released from worldly burdens which completes the journey) to be born. By allowing his grandiose personality to be extinguished, he can now catch a glimpse of the "greater world" which was heretofore hidden from him.

Rituals, such as those described in this thesis, are about the endless process of creation, which is exemplified in everything we encounter every day. We tend to limit our awareness of this miraculous progenerative condition to observations of nature without ourselves (flowers blooming, seasons changing) or to observing life-cycle events which remind us of the passing of time. But to do so is to highlight the linear progression our lives take on (from birth to death as a direct forward motion) and to ignore the cyclical, regenerative quality of life. By confronting our own deaths we are able to move beyond this sort of narrow awareness into a recognition of our own opportunity for renewal. In the larger scheme of the world, we are individually only tiny pieces of the cosmos. However, to us as individuals, our birth and growth is as momentous as the creation of the world. The impact of a revelation of such magnitude is impossible to sustain on a constant basis. Therefore, we need to reserve it for special occasions. Yom Kippur is an annual reminder of the opportunity for renewal on a grand scale.

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