

A High Holydays Message

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On the eve of Yom Kippur, before the Kol Nidre is chanted, congregations throughout the world recite a brief but controversial prayer which cites the rabbinic authorities who permit worshipping with those who are sinners the rest of the year. The concept of the prayer is startling, because it implies that otherwise we might exclude some Jews from the congregation. The prayer originated during the Spanish Inquisition, when Marranoes - forced converts to Christianity who practised Judaism secretly - would join the congregation only for the High Holy Days, and their right to do so was challenged. Yet the prayer has become a permanent part of the High Holy Days liturgy. So we must ask what its message is for the Jews of today.

The answer is that during our own times, there are still potent pressures of assimilation and hatred directed against the Jewish people, even in a free American society. They are not enforced by overt physical threats, as they were during the Inquisition but they have the

same goal - to separate the Jewish people from their traditions. By using the powers of temptation and media persuasion in our open society, these contemporary forces have been devastatingly effective in undermining and destroying the spiritual integrity of the Jewish community. Instead of the Auto-De-Fe, we read our casualty lists from the social columns of the daily newspapers.

We have in our midst today a modern generation of Marranoes - Jews who have assimilated to the point that, outside of their attendance at synagogue three days a year, they are almost indistinguishable from the non-Jews around us. It amounts to a "silent Holocaust," approaching the catastrophe of World War II Europe in the decimation of our people.

In addition to the alarmingly high rates of intermarriage and assimilation, this insidious attack has succeeded in polarizing and dividing into many opposing groups the remnants of American Jews who still strongly identify with their ethnic and religious heritage. The attempt to incorporate these alien, secular concepts into Judaism itself has confused many Jews who are sincere, but misled into believing

that their religious heritage has somehow become obsolete and must be "modernized."

Yet the call of the High Holy Days to every Jewish soul, no matter how far it may have strayed, is living proof of the timeless truth of our Torah and the eternal validity of the Jewish way of life, in its original, uncompromised form. At the same time, this controversial prayer in the High Holy Days liturgy reminds us that no Jew who still hears the call of the ram's horn and feels the stir of his or her Jewish soul can ever stray so far that he or she cannot return.

In Young Israel synagogues throughout the world the call will go out before the Kol Nidre, as it, indeed, goes out every day of the year, welcoming every Jew, near or far, to join or rejoin with the congregation of Israel in the renewal of its eternal covenant with the Creator. We may have our differences, deep and substantial ones at times, but we remain a united people, drawn together by a heritage and destiny that spans human history. On the Day of Judgement, we stand before the Almighty as His Chosen People, and we extend the hand of brotherhood and friendship to all Jews as we face the trials and tribulations ahead, with sincere wishes for a "Kesiva v'chasima tova" - a happy and healthy New Year to come.

TEL AVIV (WNS) -- The army announced it had recently arrested members of a terrorist group belonging to the mainstream Al Fatah wing of the Palestine Liberation Organization based in Judaea, it was reported.

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