

Penitence, Prayer And Charity On Yom Kippur

By Dvora Waysman

(WZPS) — This Yom Kippur Dvora Waysman discusses penitence, prayer and charity as a means of averting the severe decree, and through these three things make one's peace with God.

God said: "I do not desire the death of the wicked, but the return of the wicked from his ways." This is the essence of Yom Kippur.

When sunset approaches in Jerusalem, on the eve of the Day of Atonement, a stillness overtakes the whole city. There are no traffic noises - not even muted ones - for the whole House of Israel, observant or not, refrains from desecrating this most holy day of the Jewish calendar. The synagogues, just as all over the world, are filled as the plaintive, haunting notes of Kol Nidre usher in Yom Kippur - the Day of Atonement.

The service in the synagogue on this day revolves around the idea that on the first day of the year (Rosh Hashana) it is inscribed, and on the Day of Atonement the decree is sealed, what will be our fate for the coming year including who shall live and who shall die and by what means; but, we are told,

"Penitence, Prayer and Charity avert the severe decree."

Penitence simply means saying one is sorry and repenting, for Judaism does not admit that any human being is free from sin or infallible. We have no institution like the Papacy...even the most outstanding Rabbis enjoy only the authority of the Torah they interpret and can be subject to error. We all do wrong because we are human. Penitence begins with repairing any injury one may have done to a fellow man in full. Only then can we expect forgiveness from our

Creator.

Prayer, the second component of atonement, has its own laws. A Jew is expected to pray three times a day and in a certain way, and not just when the spirit moves him, although spontaneous prayer is also encouraged. There are different kinds of prayer, but the most frequent is a petition to grant a particular request. Such prayers are not always answered in the way the petitioner hopes, especially when one's attention is focused just on one's own needs and desires. The chief value of prayer is when the mind of the worshipper is on the act of praying, not the request to be granted. The Hebrew word for prayer is 'tefillah' from the root 'palal' meaning to judge or intercede. An important element in Jewish prayer is 'kavannah' (concentration) and it is said that prayer without this inward direction of the mind is like a body without a soul or a husk without a kernel.

The third element necessary 'to avert the severe decree' is charity. It is such an important Jewish percept that a whole section of the Shulhan Arukh (the Code of Jewish Law) is devoted to giving charity and all its ramifications. We are told (Yoreh Deah 247-259) that God has compassion on whoever has compassion on the poor; that it is a religious obligation to give as much charity as one can af-

Clemency For Underground Member

JERUSALEM (WNS) in the West Bank, who — President Chaim was serving; a 30-month sentence. He Herzog granted was immediately clemency to Uri Maier, was immediately released from jail. a member of the Jewish terrorist underground

Maier underwent spinal surgery recently and his medical condition was the primary factor in the decision to grant him clemency.

ford; and that every person is obliged to give charity - even a pauper who is himself supported by charity.

By contrast, Jews are told always to try and avoid being the recipient of charity and that it's better to live a life of pain than to be supported by others. Maimonides codified eight degrees of charity, the lowest being when the giver is glum and resentful for being asked to give. The highest degree of charity is when one gives a loan or a job so that the poor person can adequately support himself. Judaism totally endorses social measures aimed at the abolition of poverty and helping others to lead productive lives of happiness and dignity.

Perhaps the reason why Jews who observe almost nothing else still flock to synagogues on the Day of Atonement can best be illustrated by Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav's parable of the shepherd and the sheep. The shepherd plays his flute while his sheep graze and seek water. As long as the sheep hear the shepherd's music they are safe. And as long as the shepherd can hear his sheep baa-ing, he can help them if they get into trouble. But when the sheep stray so far that the shepherd cannot hear their call for help, then they are indeed lost.

When darkness descends on Jerusalem, as the long day of praying and fasting draws to a close, it reaches its final crescendo with a blast of the shofar - the ram's horn. Saadia Gaon cited ten reasons why we sound the shofar, the most important one being for the Ingathering of the Exiles - calling Jews to return to their Land, Eretz Israel:

"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." (Isaiah 27:13).

Justice Minister Moshe the more than 20 mem- Nissim, on whose bers of the un- recommendations Her- derground serving sen- zog acted, made it clear tences for crimes of violence against Arabs that this case will not set a precedent nor in the West Bank to receive clemency. He does it indicate any change of policy was convicted for his toward the Jewish un- role in the June, 1980 derground. car-bomb attacks on Maier is the first of three Arab mayors.

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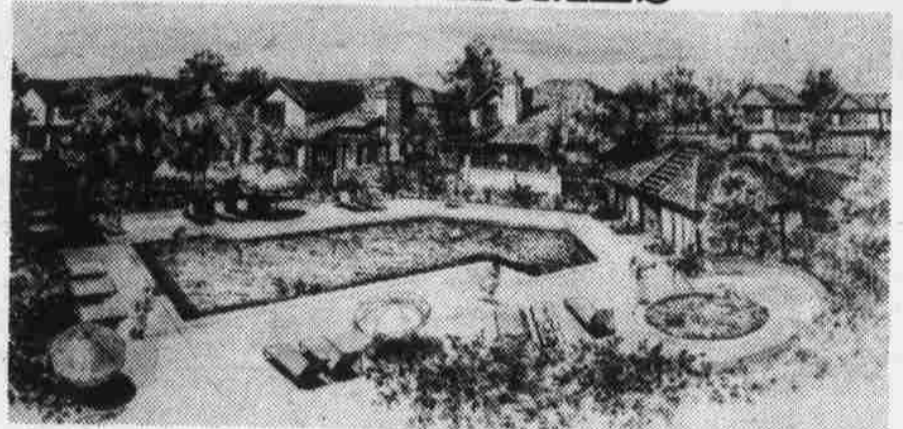


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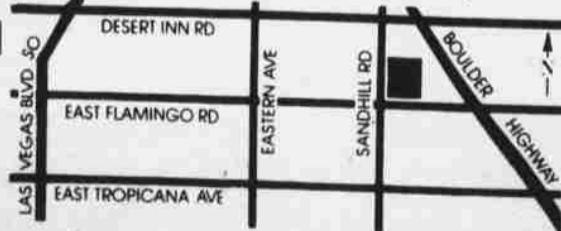
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