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**Nine Yom Kippur Myths**

**And Misconceptions**

**By**[**Menachem Posner**](https://www.chabad.org/search/keyword_cdo/kid/12145/jewish/Posner-Menachem.htm)

**1. Myth: Kol Nidre Was Invented by Crypto-Jews in Spain**

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 The Yom Kippur services begin with Kol Nidre, express our regret for any vows we may (inadvertently) make during the course of the year. There is a persistent (and romantic) myth that this formula was composed by the *anusim,*the Jews who were forced to convert to Catholicism in Spain during the Inquisition. Before convening for Yom Kippur services, they prayed that any lip service they paid to Christianity be seen as a sham and not a reflection of their true intent.

 This is supposedly also the reason why Kol Nidre is prefaced with the statement: “. . . by the authority of the Heavenly Tribunal and by the authority of the earthly tribunal, we hereby grant permission to pray with the transgressors.”

 Fact: Kol Nidre Predates the Spanish Inquisition By Hundreds of Years

 While this is certainly an inspiring anecdote, and it is quite likely that *anusim*said this prayer with added fervor, they could not have invented it since Kol Nidre predates the Inquisition by at least 500 years. In fact, there is significant discussion in the Tosafot, composed in France and Germany several hundred years before the forced Spanish conversions, regarding the precise legal ramifications of this formula.

 Indeed, many Sephardic Jews don’t even say Kol Nidre altogether, further discounting the notion that the text originated in Spain.

**2. Myth: All Leather Is Forbidden on Yom Kippur**



 Some are under the mistaken belief that one may not wear a leather belt or garment on Yom Kippur.

 Fact: Only Leather Shoes Are Out

 The five “afflictions” of Yom Kippur include not wearing “sandals,” which tradition defines as leather footwear. Other leather garments, and all other footwear, are perfectly OK.

**3. Myth: Unetaneh Tokef Was Composed**

**By a Rabbi Who Asked to be Mutilated**



 There is a haunting account attached to the cherished Yom Kippur prayer, [Unetaneh Tokef](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/2701114/jewish/Text-of-Unetaneh-Tokef-Prayer.htm%22%20%5Co%20%22Text%20of%20Unetaneh%20Tokef%20Prayer), which contains the famous words, “... who by water, and who by fire; who by sword, and who by wild beast; who by earthquake, and who by pestilence … but repentance, prayer and charity avert the severity of the decree.”

 The commonly told story, as it is indeed recorded in ancient texts, is that it was composed by Rabbi Amnon of Maintz, who told the Duke of Hessen to mutilate his body as punishment for him even considering converting to Christianity.

 Fact: Rabbi Amnon Would Never Have Done Such a Thing

 While this story is more than likely to have a kernel of truth, and Rabbi Amnon may very well have recited this prayer after being mortally mutilated by the duke, the commonly told version has some major flaws: chiefly that Rabbi Amnon would never willingly ask for his limbs to be cut off, a violation of Torah’s regard for the human body and prohibition against mutilation.

 Another issue to contend with is that the prayer was said for hundreds of years before Rabbi Amnon lived, leaving us to conclude that Rabbi Amnon may very well have infused extra meaning into this chilling piece of liturgy, but he could not have been its originator.

**4. Myth: Once You Broke the Fast, You Can Eat Freely**

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 In English, eating after fasting is often referred to as “breaking a fast.” In addition to giving us the word “breakfast,” this has also led to an all-or-nothing attitude. “Once I’ve broken the fast by eating that cookie by mistake,” the rationale may go, “I may as well have a cup of coffee and that cinnamon bun I’ve been saving for tonight.”

 Fact: Every Moment You Fast Is Valuable

 Even if you made a mistake, your Yom Kippur is in no way invalidated. Life is a ladder, and what matters most is the direction in which you are climbing. If you’ve made a mistake, own up to yourself and to G‑d, express your regret, and resolve to improve. This process, called *teshuvah*(“repentance” or “return”), is actually central to your Yom Kippur experience.

**5. Myth: Kids Fast Three Fasts Before Bar/Bat Mitzvah**



 There is a persistent myth that children must begin fasting the three fasts before their bar/bat mitzvah, no earlier and no later.

 Thus, an 11-year-old girl whose birthday is 1 Nissan, for example, should fast on Yom Kippur, since it, 10 Tevet, and the Fast of Esther would be the final three fasts before she becomes an adult in the eyes of Jewish law.

 Fact: This Has No Halachic Basis

 Children are not obligated to perform mitzvahs before attaining bar or bat mitzvah. However, there are some who educate children to fast for a year (or several years) prior, depending greatly on the strength (and desire) of the child. While we do see a number of landmarks, ranging from age 9 to age 12, three fasts before adulthood is never given as a time to begin.

**6. Myth: Yom Kippur Is a Sad Day**

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 Perhaps because it shares some basic components with Tisha B’Av, our national day of mourning for the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of our people, many view Yom Kippur as a sad day.

 Fact: Yom Kippur Is a Joyous Day

 The Talmud tells us that there were no days as joyous as 15 Av and Yom Kippur. That’s right; Yom Kippur is one of the two happiest days on the calendar! Why so happy? Well for one thing, it’s when G‑d forgives us for our sins, a day when we are cleansed from the baggage we picked up during the course of the year. How liberating is that!

 On a deeper level: This forgiveness is achieved because this day is when we rise above the mundane humdrum of our lives. Like angels, we connect to our inner souls, and by extension, we are one with G‑d himself. Now that’s worth celebrating!

**7. Myth: The Most Important Thing is to Be in Shul**



A sanctuary

 For many, the most important element of Yom Kippur is attending services and hearing the *chazan*chant the ancient prayers, so much so that they may even ride in the car or otherwise transgress the day’s laws in order to be present.

 Fact: The Yom Kippur Laws Are Non-Negotiable

 Like Shabbat, on Yom Kippur we may not do any of the [39*melachot*](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/102032/jewish/The-39-Melachot.htm), including causing combustion. For this reason, riding a car is forbidden, and when faced with the choice of driving to synagogue or remaining home, one should choose to remain home rather than drive during this sacred day.

**8. Myth: The Shofar Ends the Fast**



 After we have fasted for 25 hours, one of the high points of the Neila (concluding) service is crying out the Shema in unison, followed by the sounding of the shofar. There is a common belief that the shofar blowing causes the fast to end, which has led some to mistakenly blow shofar and eat before night has fallen.

 Fact: The Fast Ends When Stars Come Out

 There are some who explain that we blow shofar to publicize that the evening following Yom Kippur is a holiday, and it is now time to feast and celebrate the closeness we’ve achieved and the forgiveness we’ve secured during this awesome day.

 However, the shofar does not cause the fast to end any more than the dinging of your toaster makes your bread brown and crunchy. Rather, nightfall and Havdalah ([see when that is in your area](https://www.chabad.org/calendar/zmanim.asp?hdate=7/10)) are what permit a person to eat.

**9. Myth: Yom Kippur Service Is a Typical Prayer Service**



The open ark in the main sanctuary of Lubavitch Chabad of Skokie.

 Many people attend synagogue only on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and are dismayed to discover that the services are conducted in a language they don’t understand and seem to stretch on for h-o-u-r-s. It’s only natural for them not to want to come back. After all, why would they subject themselves to such an experience again and again?

 Fact: That’s Like Coming to School Just for Exam Day

 Imagine you decide to come to school only when absolutely necessary—the one day when you take an exam on all the material you’ve studied the entire year. Quite understandably, you’d consider school to be the most miserable, tortuous place, where you spend the entire day attempting to divine the answers to questions you don’t understand.

 Obviously, if you’d come all year you’d know that school is an exciting place where you discover new information and enjoy the pleasure of learning. You’d also be well-positioned to answer the questions presented to you at the end-of-the-year exam.

 So don’t be a stranger. Come to shul again and again, and you’ll discover the rhythm and reason behind the prayers. And even the extra-long High Holiday services won’t seem quite so long and bewildering!

*Reprinted from the Yom Kippur 5781 email of Chabad.Org Magazine.*

**Rabbi Berel Wein on**

**Yom Kippur 5781**



 Yom Kippur is the quintessential and unique Jewish holy day of the year. All the other holidays that our G-d has given to us as a faith and as a people have their parallels in non-Jewish society. All societies have days of national independence, harvest festivals of Thanksgiving, celebrations of victories and historic moments of salvation and national preservation.

 Naturally, our holy days of this genre are far different than others, in that they are accompanied by specific biblical commandments as to how the day is to be commemorated and what holy rituals, special foods and unique prayer services are to be attached to and are an integral part of the commemoration of that day.

 We can see that the concept behind these days such as Pesach. Shavuot. Succot. Chanuka and Purim have characteristics that are universal, that can be said to apply to other nations in the world. This is even true of Rosh Hashana. since every culture has some sort of day to begin the new year, whether it be on the solar or lunar calendar.

**Yom Kippur Has No Equal Anywhere in Human Civilization**

 But Yom Kippur is different in every way and has no equal anywhere in human civilization or history. There is no other day on the calendar that commands the attention of Jews to the relationship between the G-d of Israel and the people of Israel, as does the day of Yom Kippur. The day of Yom Kippur is a gift from G-d to the people of Israel, and in all the millennia of its existence it has remained an exclusively Jewish concept and holiday.

 The very concept of forgiveness per se is itself a novel and even surprising one. After all, whatever a person has done has a finality to it, and there always are consequences that are derived and emanate from human behavior. It is almost illogical to think that, somehow, the past can be undone, that wrongs can be righted, foolishness and sin are erased as though they never happened. These consequences are true in human terms.

**Heaven Operates in a Manner that is**

**Far Beyond Our Understanding**

 Humans have the power to forgive, but never the power to retract or correct what was done before. But heaven is operating in a manner that is far beyond our understanding or our ability to judge. The unlimited power of the Almighty seems to include the retroactive ability to erase what happened before, and, the capacity to change the consequences that previous behavior may have ordained and were deemed to be immutable.

 This idea is the expression of the will and mercy of heaven, extended to us as put forth in the words of the great prophet Yechezkel: “The   L-rd does not wish for the death of human beings due to their sins, but rather wishes that they repent of their evil ways and thereby live.” The L-rd is the master of second chances. This is a rare and uniquely Jewish idea. It opens the way for regrets and rehabilitation, restoration, and accomplishment. Without such ideas, and without such an understanding of the Creator, we would truly be bereft of hope and confidence in our future and in our very lives.

 But this great gift must be earned. The Torah does not offer us a free lunch under any circumstances. Yom Kippur comes with a list of requirements, not just for the day, such as abstaining from food and drink etc., but it also requires a complete change of heart and attitude, and true regret on our part for the missteps of our past, and certainly of the past year.

 We have all been sorely tested in this past year, with unexpected plagues and tragedies, and a complete change in our societal lives and even our economic fortunes. The events of the past year should certainly have humbled us and made us think twice before we again boast of our abilities and achievements. It, hopefully, has made us less arrogant and dampened our egos. And that should be viewed as a good thing, for the beginning of repentance is always the feeling of humility and a certain degree of helplessness. We are, after all, but flesh and blood, mortal and frightened, alone and powerless before forces over whom we exert no influence or power.

 We can only ask the Lord that mercy and patience should be extended to us, and that we will try in this coming year to live up to the great challenges and demands that Jewish life imposes upon us. Additionally, that we will view these challenges and demands as opportunities, and not as negative trials.

*Reprinted from this week’s website of Rabbiwein.com*

**Shoes and the Secret**

**Of Yom Kippur**

**By Rabbi Shmuel Reichman**

 Yom Kippur is one of the most important days on the Jewish calendar; it is also one of the most unique. While we may think of Yom Kippur as a solemn and difficult day, the Jewish sages refer to Yom Kippur as a joyous and spiritually uplifting day. In fact, Yom Kippur is linked to the happiest day of the year - Purim. The name itself, *Yom Kippurim*, literally means “a day like Purim.” However, Purim is a time of feasting and joy, and Yom Kippur is a day when we remove ourselves completely from the physical world - we do not eat or drink, engage in marital relations, wash ourselves, or wear leather shoes. These behaviors are often associated with mourning and sadness, the exact opposite of the joy we experience on Purim. If Yom Kippur is indeed meant to be a joyous holiday as well, how do we reconcile this with the restrictions of the day?

**Soul Questions: What Are We?**

 Most people believe that they "have" a soul, some spiritual essence within themselves. However, Jewish sources teach that you don't *have* a soul, you *are* a soul. The soul is not an aspect of yourself, or some spiritual component of your being; it *is* your very self. You *are* a soul, a consciousness, a spiritual being. When you say "I", you are referring to your soul, your inner sense of self. You *have* a body, emotions, and an intellect, all aspects and expressions of your soul. But at root, you are a soul, a *neshama*, an infinitely expansive consciousness.



*Yom Kippur provides the unique opportunity to transcend our physical limitations and embrace our truest sense of self.*

 A soul is angelic, perfect, pure, and transcendent. However, the moment one enters this physical world, the infinite expansiveness of the soul is confined within the physical body, its container in this world. The body is meant to be the tool of the soul, allowing the soul to fully manifest its will in this world.

 This is our mission in life. As we journey through life, we tap into greater and greater aspects of our soul, our true self, and we must then manifest them into the world through our physical bodies. In doing so, we uplift our physical vessels and enable them to tap into greater and greater aspects of our true self. Life consists of the endless expansion and expression of self into this physical world.

**The struggle in life is to see past the material and realize that we are**

**souls in a physical casing longing for deeper meaning and fulfillment.**

 But it is easy for people to forget that they are a soul, and instead identify with their physical body whose urges and desires are ever-present and enticing. Born in to a physical world, we tend to believe that we are only that which we can see.

 The struggle in life is to see past the material and its craving for immediate gratification, and realize that we are angelic souls in a physical casing longing for deeper meaning and fulfillment. Yom Kippur is the time to realize that we are at essence spiritual beings trying to uplift our physical experience.

**The Spiritual Concept of Shoes**



 Understanding the meaning behind removing our shoes on Yom Kippur sheds light on the relationship between the soul and the body. The Nefesh Ha'Chaim (1:5, note 6) explains the profound spiritual concept of shoes. The body uses the shoe as a way of traveling through the world. The lowest part of your body resides in your shoe, which allows you to walk.

 This relationship between your body and shoe is the same exact relationship between you and your body. You are an angelic soul, a *neshama*. Your body is your container, your "shoe", which allows you to interact with the world, move around, and actualize your potential.

 Interestingly, the Hebrew word for shoe, *na'al*, also means to "lock", because the shoes lock your feet in and allow you to walk around. So too, your body locks your angelic self in, allowing you to control your body and use it to navigate this physical world.

**Taking your "foot" out of your "shoe" represents**

**taking your angelic soul out of your body.**

 On Yom Kippur, we remove our shoes, which represents transcending our physical bodies. Taking your "foot" out of your "shoe" represents taking your angelic soul out of your body. Yom Kippur is the one day of the year when we completely free ourselves of our physical limitations and embrace our angelic selves.

 The central theme of Yom Kippur is “*teshuva*,” repentance. *Teshuva* literally means “return”; on Yom Kippur we return to our ultimate root, our spiritual and perfect soul. The Jewish Sages teach that Yom Kippur is the one day of the year when we have the ability to become angelic. On this day, our lower selves and our physical urges are powerless, they cannot bring us down. On Yom Kippur, we are transcending our physical bodies, embracing our angelic selves. As such, we remove our shoes, our "physical vessels".

 Removing our shoes on Yom Kippur is one of the five prohibitions of the day, all of which conform to the same theme: transcendence. Food is that which connects our body and soul, keeping us alive and rooted in the physical world. This is why fasting makes us feel faint, and prolonged hunger causes lack of consciousness and eventually death. On Yom Kippur, we intentionally loosen the connection between body and soul, transcending our physical casing and experiencing one day of living in a purely angelic state.

**The Opportunity of Yom Kippur**

 Yom Kippur provides the unique opportunity to transcend, to experience the infinite and embracing our truest sense of self.

 The transcendent experience of Yom Kippur lays the foundation for the rest of the year. While the physical can be destructive if misused, the ideal is not to completely transcend the physical, but rather to *use* the physical in order to reflect something higher. Our goal as humans is not to escape the physical, but to use it as a means of connecting to the transcendent.

 Sukkot, the holiday that immediately follows Yom Kippur, embodies this lesson in embracing the physical. Our root must be transcendent, grounded firmly in the spiritual, and then atop that foundation we can descend into the physical and use it in a transcendent way.

 May we be inspired to fully experience our angelic selves this Yom Kippur, and then infuse the totality of our spiritual acquisition into our physical life, elevating our actions and intentions as we move this physical world towards its ultimate spiritual root.

*Reprinted from the Yom Kippur 5780 email of Aish.com*

**The Wake Up Call**

**Of Kol Nidrei**



 This happened exactly 8 years ago.  We reverently made our way to the synagogue, and with excitement took our seats. We recited the blessing “to enwrap in a tallit”. Now, we were beginning to feel the awesomeness of the day. It’s here. The other worshippers felt the same.

 Slowly the synagogue filled with worshippers. There was another five minutes until the chazan would begin *“Lecha Keili T’shukati”*. Everyone would soon join in to that refrain announcing that G-d’s angels above have come down to us. It’s the end of the Ten Days of Repentance, the days when we tried to improve ourselves and accept upon ourselves new resolutions, after 40 days of getting up at dawn to say the Selichot penitential prayers. And now we have arrived at the culmination of it all, the great day. The day when we are similar to the ministering angels.

 We were dressed in white, pure like snow. In another 24 hours, we would be deep in the Neila prayer, the crowning prayer of this holy day, but right now, as soon as the chazan began the piyyut *“Lecha Keili T’shukati”*, we returned to the moments when we were welcoming this sublime day, instead of watching it depart.

**A Young Fellow with a White Kippah on His Head with Long Hair**

 The chazan began, and we and the rest of the worshippers put the tallit over our heads and began to sing with emotion. Everyone knows the tune. And then a young fellow sat next to me, a white kippah on his head, long hair, with a white shirt, pants and shoes.

 He politely asked me to open the prayerbook for him and show him the page. In those moments, you ask yourself: should I adopt him this Yom Kippur, should I show him each page and even learn with him a few of the melodies, or should I say “I have to take care of myself. Don’t bother me. I have to focus on myself because I want to feel Yom Kippur instead of let someone else feel Yom Kippur.”

 Then you suddenly remember that you are in the neighborhood synagogue, and everyone came to pray. It’s a great merit and opportunity for you.

 After I decided to “adopt” the fellow, I turned my heard, looked around and realized that at least another five worshippers are doing the same. You feel a sense of responsibility. Yes, it’s not a chore, it’s a privilege, maybe a great privilege. Because you know that your every movement is being watched by another pair of eyes. You have to immerse yourself completely in the prayers and teach your new “partner” every word. To explain to him the prayer you say silently and the confessions “We were guilty, we acted treacherously.”

**He Now Keeps the Torah’s Commandments**

 During the Shemoneh Esreh prayer, he followed the instructions. At the conclusion of the night prayers, he asked me at what hour was daybreak so he could come on time when the morning prayers would begin. He arrived the next morning on time. And the same for the afternoon prayer. Since then and until today, we’re in contact with each other, and he is a Jew who now keeps the Torah’s commandments.

\* \* \*

 I will never forget this Yom Kippur — not because of Adi, the Jew who sat next to me the entire Yom Kippur — but because of what happened when they began the Kol Nidrei prayers on Yom Kippur night.

 We were repeating the prayers after the chazan, feeling in our bones how the gates were beginning to open up before us, when, without prior notice, at the pinnacle of this lofty moment, a mobile phone began to ring. Ugh, how can we continue Kol Nidrei? You look right and left, trying to figure out where that r-i-n-g-i-n-g is coming from.

 For a moment, I thought it was Adi’s phone. Maybe he forgot his mobile phone in his pocket, who knows what. But no. He turned colors because everyone was looking at him. He whispered to me, “It’s not me.” I encouraged him, and suggested that it was maybe the phone that some child had taken from his father.

**Again that Annoying Ringing**

 Silence. We got back into Kol Nidrei. Then again that annoying r-i-n-g-i-n-g. This time, we already figured out who had the phone. It wasn’t a child or a toddler. It was a phone ringing in the pocket of a Bukharian fellow from the Caucus who arrived for Kol Nidrei with his friends. He picked up that everyone was staring at him, felt uncomfortable and left the synagogue.

 We were shocked. When the Torah scroll was returned to the Holy Ark, all of a sudden we realized that this person may have been a lost soul trying to reconnect to his roots. We felt a pinch in our heart. Why didn’t we encourage another fellow Jew to connect to his Father in heaven?

 I learned from Adi at the end of Yom Kippur that this is the greatest day when you can draw more and more Jews to our Father in heaven. They are all coming to taste Yom Kippur. This could be your chance to help another Jew draw close to the Torah.

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 Five years ago, a synagogue was founded in our neighborhood which was named Nitzutzei Yisrael (“Jewish Sparks”) after the Baba Sali [Rav Yisrael Abuchatzera]. The synagogue was founded by Rebetzin Simi Abutchatzera and the one who ran it and served as its rabbi was Rabbi Oren Malkah. Whoever entered this synagogue didn’t leave it. It was like a magnet. It had the atmosphere of a family. The rabbi taught Torah ideas that were pertinent, spiced with stories of tzadikim.

**One of the Worshippers was Yigal**

 Every synagogue is important and has its own flavor, but Nitzutzei Yisrael was unique. One of its worshippers was Yigal. We called him Rav Yigal, he had a large black kippah on his head and he always sat at the side looking into a gemara, a commentary on the weekly Torah portion, the commentary of the Ohr Hachaim, or a book of ethics. He utilized every second to the utmost. He would also ask questions, argue, give the impression that he knows and wants to know even more.

 To tell the truth, until the synagogue opened, we didn’t know who he was. The synagogue was adjoining his home. He would say he was completely devoted to G-d.

 One Shabbat night when Rabbi Malkah was addressing the worshippers, Yigal didn’t understand him and kept asking him to explain his words. He wanted to understand the Torah. He wanted to fill his huge hole of ignorance.

**The Light Was Always on in the Home of Yigal the Bukhari**

 Sometimes when I passed by his neighborhood at a late hour, such as two hours after midnight, the light was always on in the salon. The light was always on in the home of Yigal the Bukhari, a sign that he was busy with Torah study. He was busy trying to understand a subject in Bava Kama or in the middle of studying Taanit to learn the practical laws.

 He would research the topic in the Shulchan Aruch, and afterwards would study the Yabia Omer (written by Rabbi Ovadya Yosef, may his merit protect us), and the Yalkut Yosef (by the Rishon Lezion, the present Chief Rabbi Rabbi Yitzchak Yosef) and the Halacha Berura (by the member of the Council of Torah sages, Rabbi David Yosef). In the end, after he had delved to understand the topic, he wanted to know how to keep the practical law.

 The truth is that I didn’t know very much about Yigal the Bukharian. Every so often I liked to hear what topics he was grappling with, to try and find an answer. In general, gemara study is sweet when you are confronted with a question and have to turn over the Rishonim and Achronim until you find a satisfying answer.

**Rav Oren Malkah’s Celebration of His Daughter’s Engagement**

 One Thursday, Rav Oren Malkah invited me to a celebration at his home in honor of his daughter the bride. Yigal was also there with a book in his hand. He was deep in the topic and instead of letting his mind wander, he decided to study.

 We washed our hands and sat down to drink a little wine and eat. There was a happy atmosphere in the house, we were rejoicing with a bride and groom and Yigal was also eating and drinking with us. And then… we all became a little tipsy and began to pour forth Torah thoughts and praise for the bride’s father. Each person of course had much to say about Rabbi Malkah, the rabbi of our synagogue.

 Then came the turn of Yigal the Bukharian. He began to speak about the synagogue and how much inspiration he gets from it. He also related that his children are studying in a Talmud Torah. Then he began to tell his personal story, which surprised us: “Eight years ago — I became acquainted with Judaism. You know how?” he asked. “In the merit of my mobile phone that rang on Yom Kippur night.”

 I started, “What do you mean?”

 “Yes, me, Yigal — my mobile phone rang on Kol Nidrei night.”

 What? Yes. He was that guy… We were shocked.

 Yigal related: “I came to the Ben Ish Chai synagogue to pray on Yom Kippur evening. I knew that one should go to a synagogue on Yom Kippur, so I went with a few friends. Then one of my friends who wanted to pray with us called my phone because he wanted to know where we were. I didn’t know that this was not allowed. I was about to take the phone call, but the eyes of all the worshippers who were looking to see who was holding a mobile phone on the holy day gave me to understand that I had a problem. I put the phone on mute, waited a minute, and then the phone rang again. I was so embarrassed that I left the synagogue.

**He Explained Everything to Me from A to Z**

 “On Sukkot, I met Rabbi Avichai Fachima and told him what had happened to me with the phone. He had been praying in the same synagogue and he understood. He explained to me everything from A to Z. About Judaism, about prayers, about the holidays, and a huge amount about the Creator of the universe. What G-d really wants from us, and why He created the world.

 “Since then until today, I have been growing in Torah and fear of G-d,” Yigal the Bukharian told us. “Since that Yom Kippur, I have been a kosher Jew. A happy person, because I know the purpose of my life. I feel that I came to the world not just to eat and drink and sleep, but much more than that.”

 Yigal, it turns out, didn’t only save himself. He does outreach to many other Bukharian youths. He teaches them about Shabbat, tefillin, prayers and of course how to keep other commandments.

 “When I look at myself today, I say that were it not for that phone ringing at the beginning of Yom Kippur during Kol Nidrei, who knows if today I would be a G-d-fearing Jew? Only because of the shock which I felt because everyone was looking at me, did I decide to start learning and understanding. Since then, I discovered Judaism, the light in the Torah, and the only thing I want to do today is to keep finishing the Talmud and learn from G-d’s wellsprings.

**“I wish my story would bring at least one Jew to repent.”**

 “I allow you to reveal my story, but only on one condition: That I can be sure that my story would bring at least one Jew to repent. That it will revive one Jew. Because the only thing I want today is to get close to G-d.”

 Yigal immigrated from Bukharia as a young teenager. He didn’t know anything about Judaism, not Shabbat, not Yom Kippur, he just knew he was a Jew. His parents circumcised him, but nothing else.

 His story shows how every Jew has a spark in him. You just have to find that spark and set it aflame. Who knows how many Jews like him are living among us?

 In our generation it is possible to draw more and more Jews close, particularly because of the revolution for which our great teacher Rabbi Ovadya Yosef laid the ground. His holy words still resound in our ears: We shouldn’t be happy that we saved ourselves. We are Torah students.  Each one of us has the ability to bring another Jew close to our Father in heaven. It’s our duty to go from home to home and register more children for Jewish education. It’s our duty and perhaps also our privilege to fulfill Rabbi Yosef’s

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