

## YOM KIPPUR - DAY OF ATONEMENT



Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement on the 10<sup>th</sup> of *Tishri* (Thursday, September 27) is the stirring climax of the 10 Days of Repentance, which began with Rosh Hashanah. It is regarded as the holiest day on the Jewish calendar. On this awesome day

our people are compared to angels who do not eat or experience other physical pleasures in order to fully devote themselves to their spiritual mission.

A saintly rabbi once remarked, “If I had my way, I would do away with all fasts except two; the fast of the Ninth of Av, when we mourn for our Temple, for who could eat on that day? And the other, the holy day of Yom Kippur—for who needs to eat on that day?”

## YOM KIPPUR EVE

In the late afternoon, before sunset, we eat a holiday meal before the fast. At this momentous time, parents traditionally bless their children, and allocate charity for the needy, in keeping with the admonition: “Repentance, Prayer, and Charity avert the evil decree!” Then with a sense of trepidation and awe, we enter the synagogue for the *Kol Nidrei* Service.

## KOL NIDREI SERVICE

At dusk, as men, women, and children gather in the synagogue, the Torahs are removed from the Holy Ark. The congregation rises and the cantor chants the inspiring words of *Kol Nidrei* with a haunting melody, first introduced in Germany in the mid-sixteenth century.

Interestingly, *Kol Nidrei*, which means “All vows” isn’t really a prayer at all: it is an absolution of vows! We are taught not to make vows, oaths or promises, which we are often unable to fulfill; our words are sacred and one never knows what the future may bring. Thus, if we wish to make a pledge, we customarily add: “*b’lee neder*” – “no vows intended!” This *Kol Nidrei* service took on special significance in the fifteenth-century in Spain and Portugal, when Jews were forced to either convert to Christianity or be burned at the stake. Many practiced Christianity outwardly, but secretly continued to practice Judaism; they became known as Marranos, the secret Jews. When the Marranos recited *Kol Nidrei*, they begged G-d to release them from their public vows to abandon the faith of their fathers. They wished always to remain loyal Jews!

