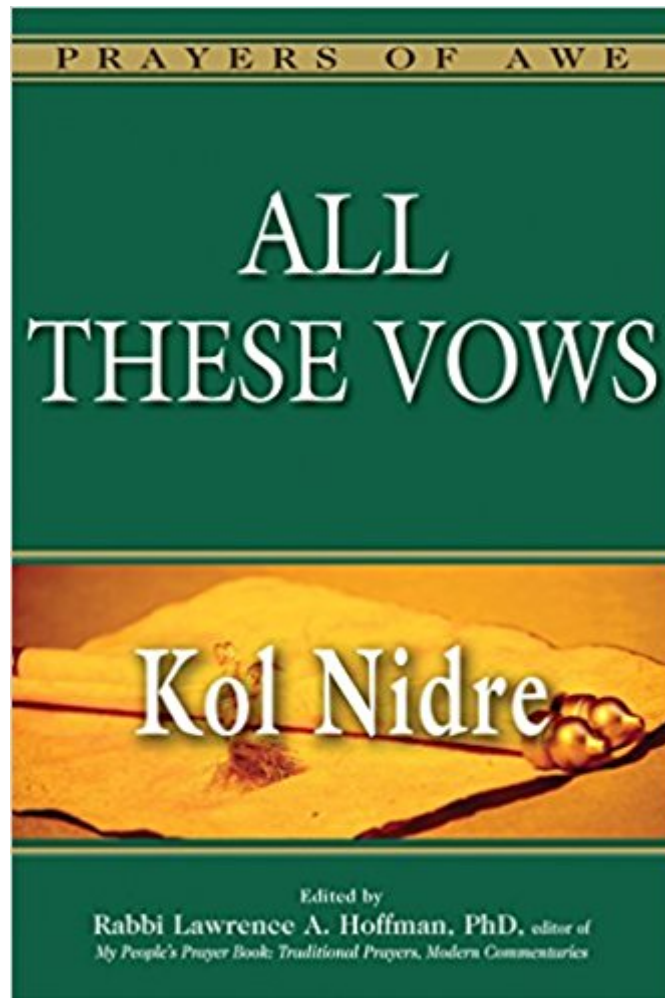




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# All These Vows: Kol Nidre (Prayers Of Awe)



## Synopsis

The most memorable prayer of the Jewish New Yearâ •what it means, why we sing it, and the secret of its magical appeal. Through a series of lively commentaries, over thirty contributorsâ •men and women, scholars and rabbis, artists and poets, spanning three continents and all major Jewish denominationsâ •examine Kol Nidre's theology, usage, and deeply personal impact. They trace the actual history of the prayer and attempts through the ages to emend it, downplay it and even do away with itâ •all in vain. They explore why Kol Nidre remains an annual liturgical highlight that is regularly attended even by Jews who disbelieve everything the prayer says. Prayers of Awe An exciting new series that examines the High Holy Day liturgy to enrich the praying experience of everyoneâ •whether experienced worshipers or guests who encounter Jewish prayer for the very first time. Contributors: Rabbi Tony Bayfield, CBE, DD â ¢ Dr. Annette M. Boeckler â ¢ Dr. Marc Zvi Brettler â ¢ Dr. Erica Brown â ¢ Dr. Eliezer Diamond â ¢ Rabbi Ruth Durchslag, PsyD â ¢ Rachel Farbiarz â ¢ Rabbi Edward Feinstein â ¢ Rabbi Shoshana Boyd Gelfand â ¢ Rabbi Andrew Goldstein, PhD â ¢ Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman, PhD â ¢ Rabbi Delphine Horvilleur â ¢ Rabbi Elie Kaunfer â ¢ Rabbi Karyn D. Kedar â ¢ Dr. Reuven Kimelman â ¢ Dr. Mark Kligman â ¢ Rabbi Lawrence Kushner â ¢ Rabbi Noa Kushner â ¢ Rabbi Daniel Landes â ¢ Liz Lerman â ¢ Catherine Madsen â ¢ Rabbi Jonathan Magonet, PhD â ¢ Rabbi Dalia Marx, PhD â ¢ Ruth Messinger â ¢ Rabbi Charles H. Middleburgh, PhD â ¢ Rabbi Rachel Nussbaum â ¢ Rabbi Aaron Panken, PhD â ¢ Rabbi Marc Saperstein, PhD â ¢ Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso â ¢ Rabbi Jonathan P. Slater, DMin â ¢ Rabbi David Stern â ¢ Rabbi David A. Teutsch, PhD â ¢ Dr. Ellen M. Umansky â ¢ Rabbi Margaret Moers Wenig, DD â ¢ Dr. Ron Wolfson â ¢ Rabbi Daniel G. Zemel â ¢ Dr. Wendy Zierler

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Another fascinating and useful series on prayer and liturgy is brought to life by Rabbi Hoffman, long-time Professor of Liturgy at Hebrew Union Collegeâ “Jewish Institute of Religion.” Kol Nidre is at one and the same time both less and more than a prayer: ‘less than’ a prayer in that it is actually a legal formula with none of the formal characteristics that designate prayers as a distinctive outcry of the human spirit: but ‘more than’ a prayer in that it is an entire ritual in and of itself.” Discussing the issues raised by the moral problem of abjuring all vows, Rabbi Hoffman considers the opinions of the seventh-century geonim (Rabbinic authorities) that, speaking of Kol Nidre, “call it a foolish custom that is to be avoided” and debunks theories connecting the prayer to the suffering of conversos during the Spanish Inquisition. 38 essays explore the history of the prayer, its relation to Jewish law, its appearance, modifications and omission in the liturgy through the ages, the music and interpretation of the prayer today. The authors include a roster of well-regarded Rabbis and scholars in the American and British world of Reform, Conservative and Liberal Judaism. As is often the case in a collection of essays, there is much that is repetitive, but the reader can choose to read just a few essays and still understand them thoroughly. Includes bibliographic notes, glossary but no index. (Merrily Hart Association of Jewish Libraries Newsletter)

Catherine Madsen is the author of *The Bones Reassemble: Reconstituting Liturgical Speech*; *In Medias Res: Liturgy for the Estranged*; and a novel, *A Portable Egypt*. She is librettist for Robert Stern’s oratorio “Shofar” (on the CD *Awakenings*, Navona Records NV5878), and bibliographer at the Yiddish Book Center. She contributed to *May God Remember: Memory and Memorializing in Judaism* • *Yizkor*, *Who by Fire, Who by Water* • *Un’taneh Tokef*, *All These Vows* • *Kol Nidre*, and *We Have Sinned: Sin and Confession in Judaism* • *Ashamnu and Al Chet* (all *Jewish Lights*). Dr. Annette M. Boeckler is lecturer for liturgy at Leo Baeck College in London and manager of its library. She studied theology, Jewish studies, and Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Germany and Switzerland and chazzanut both privately (with cantor Marcel Lang, z”l, and cantor Jeremy Burko) and at the Levisson Instituut in Amsterdam. She contributed to *All These Vows* • *Kol Nidre*, *May God Remember: Memory and Memorializing in Judaism* • *Yizkor* and *We Have Sinned: Sin and Confession in Judaism* • *Ashamnu and Al Chet* (all *Jewish Lights*). Dr. Eliezer Diamond is the Rabbi Judah Nadich Associate Professor of Talmud and Rabbinics at The Jewish Theological Seminary

and the author of *Holy Men and Hunger Artists: Fasting and Asceticism in Rabbinic Culture*. He is currently editing a commentary on Yerushalmi Pesachim written by the late Professor Louis Ginzberg, as well as a book on prayer.

Dr. Ellen M. Umansky is the Carl and Dorothy Bennett Professor of Judaic Studies at Fairfield University in Fairfield, Connecticut. She is currently working on a book focusing on Judaism, liberalism, feminism, and God. She contributed to *Who by Fire, Who by Water* •Un'taneh Tokef, *We Have Sinned: Sin and Confession in Judaism* •Ashamnu and Al Chet and *All These Vows* •Kol Nidre (both Jewish Lights).

Dr. Erica Brown, an inspiring writer and educator, is scholar-in-residence for the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington. She consults for the Jewish Agency and other Jewish non-profits, and is a faculty member of the Wexner Foundation. She is an Avi Chai Fellow, winner of the Ted Farber Professional Excellence Award, and the recipient of a Covenant Award for her work in education. She is author of *Confronting Scandal: How Jews Can Respond When Jews Do Bad Things*; *Inspired Jewish Leadership: Practical Approaches to Building Strong Communities*, a finalist for the National Jewish Book Award, and *Spiritual Boredom: Rediscovering the Wonder of Judaism*; and co-author of *The Case for Jewish Peoplehood: Can We Be One?* (all Jewish Lights). She contributed to *We Have Sinned: Sin and Confession in Judaism* •Ashamnu and Al Chet, *Who by Fire, Who by Water* •Un'taneh Tokef and *All These Vows* •Kol Nidre (both Jewish Lights). She lectures widely on subjects of Jewish interest and leadership. She lives in Silver Spring, Maryland, with her husband and four children, and can be reached at [www.EricaBrown.com](http://www.EricaBrown.com).

Dr. Marc Zvi Brettler is the Dora Golding Professor of Biblical Studies at Brandeis University. He contributed to all volumes of the *My People's Prayer Book: Traditional Prayers, Modern Commentaries* series, winner of the National Jewish Book Award, and to *My People's Passover Haggadah: Traditional Texts, Modern Commentaries*; *Who by Fire, Who by Water* •Un'taneh Tokef; *All These Vows* •Kol Nidre; *May God Remember: Memory and Memorializing in Judaism* •Yizkor; and *We Have Sinned: Sin and Confession in Judaism* •Ashamnu and Al Chet (all Jewish Lights). He is coeditor of *The Jewish Annotated New Testament* and *The Jewish Study Bible*, which won the National Jewish Book Award; co-author of *The Bible and the Believer*; and author of *How to Read the Jewish Bible*, among other books and articles. He has also been interviewed on National Public Radio's *Fresh Air* by Terry Gross.

Dr. Mark Kligman is professor of Jewish musicology at Hebrew Union College's "Jewish Institute of Religion" in New York, where he teaches in the School of Sacred Music. He specializes in the liturgical traditions of Middle Eastern Jewish communities and various areas of popular Jewish music. His publications on the liturgical music of Syrian Jews in Brooklyn have appeared in journals and in his book, *Maqa-m and Liturgy: Ritual, Music and Aesthetics of Syrian Jews in Brooklyn*.

Reuven Kimelman is professor of classical Judaica at Brandeis University. He is the author of *The Mystical Meaning of Lekha Dodi* and *Kabbalat Shabbat* and of the audio books *The Moral Meaning of the Bible* and *The Hidden Poetry of the Jewish Prayerbook*. He contributed to *Who by Fire, Who by Water* • *Un'taneh Tokef, All These Vows* • *Kol Nidre* and *We Have Sinned: Sin and Confession in Judaism* • *Ashamnu and Al Chet* (all Jewish Lights). Dr. Ron Wolfson, visionary educator and inspirational speaker, is Fingerhut Professor of Education at American Jewish University in Los Angeles and a cofounder of Synagogue 3000. He is author of *Relational Judaism: Using the Power of Relationships to Transform the Jewish Community*; *The Seven Questions You're Asked in Heaven: Reviewing and Renewing Your Life on Earth*; *Be Like God: God's To-Do List for Kids*; *God's To-Do List: 103 Ways to Be an Angel and Do God's Work on Earth*; *Hanukkah, Passover and Shabbat*, all Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs *Art of Jewish Living* family guides to spiritual celebrations; *The Spirituality of Welcoming: How to Transform Your Congregation into a Sacred Community*; *A Time to Mourn, a Time to Comfort: A Guide to Jewish Bereavement and Comfort*; and, with Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman, *What You Will See Inside a Synagogue* (all Jewish Lights), a book for children ages 6 and up. He contributed to *May God Remember: Memory and Memorializing in Judaism* • *Yizkor, Who by Fire, Who by Water* • *Un'taneh Tokef, All These Vows* • *Kol Nidre*, and *We Have Sinned: Sin and Confession in Judaism* • *Ashamnu and Al Chet* (all Jewish Lights). Dr. Ron Wolfson is available to speak on the following topics: *Building Good Tents: Envisioning the Synagogue of the Future* *God's To-Do List* *The Seven Questions You're Asked in Heaven* *Blessings and Kisses: The Power of the Jewish Family* *A Time to Mourn, a Time to Comfort* [Click here to contact the author.](#) Dr. Wendy Zierler is professor of modern Jewish literature and feminist studies at Hebrew Union College • Jewish Institute of Religion, New York. She is translator and coeditor with Rabbi Carole Balin of *To Tread on New Ground: The Selected Writings of Hava Shapiro* (forthcoming) and a *Behikansi atah* (Shapiro's collected writings, in the original/Hebrew). She is also author of *And Rachel Stole the Idols* and the feminist Haggadah commentary featured in *My People's Passover Haggadah: Traditional Texts, Modern Commentaries* (Jewish Lights), a finalist for the National Jewish Book Award. She contributed to *May God Remember: Memory and Memorializing in Judaism* • *Yizkor, Who by Fire, Who by Water* • *Un'taneh Tokef, All These Vows* • *Kol Nidre*, and *We Have Sinned: Sin and Confession in Judaism* • *Ashamnu and Al Chet* (all Jewish Lights). Liz Lerman is founding artistic director of the Liz Lerman Dance Exchange. A member of Temple Micah in Washington, DC, she was the Sally Priesand Visiting Professor at Hebrew Union College • Jewish Institute of Religion. She is the recipient of the National Foundation for Jewish Culture Award in Performing Arts, the American Jewish Congress Golda Award, and a

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Confession in Judaism •Ashamnu and Al Chet and All These Vows •Kol Nidre (all Jewish Lights). Rabbi David A. Teutsch, PhD, is the Wiener Professor of Contemporary Jewish Civilization and director of the Center for Jewish Ethics at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, where he served as president for nearly a decade. He was editor in chief of the seven-volume Kol Haneshamah prayer book series. His book *A Guide to Jewish Practice: Everyday Living* (RRC Press) won the National Jewish Book Award for Contemporary Jewish Life and Practice. He is also author of *Spiritual Community: The Power to Restore Hope, Commitment and Joy* (Jewish Lights) and several other books. He contributed to *May God Remember: Memory and Memorializing in Judaism •Yizkor, Who by Fire, Who by Water •Un'taneh Tokef, All These Vows •Kol Nidre, and We Have Sinned: Sin and Confession in Judaism •Ashamnu and Al Chet* (all Jewish Lights). Rabbi David Stern is senior rabbi of Temple Emanu-El in Dallas, Texas. He contributed to *May God Remember: Memory and Memorializing in Judaism •Yizkor, Who by Fire, Who by Water •Un'taneh Tokef and All These Vows •Kol Nidre* (all Jewish Lights). Rabbi Delphine Horvilleur is the rabbi of congregation MJLF (Mouvement Juif Libéral de France) in Paris. She was ordained at Hebrew Union College "Jewish Institute of Religion in New York in 2008 and is one of two women rabbis in France. She is the creative director of Le Café Biblique, a pluralistic group of Jewish study, and chief editor of *Tenou'a* ([www.tenoua.com](http://www.tenoua.com)), a French magazine of Jewish thought. She contributed to *May God Remember: Memory and Memorializing in Judaism •Yizkor, Who by Fire, Who by Water •Un'taneh Tokef, All These Vows •Kol Nidre, and We Have Sinned: Sin and Confession in Judaism •Ashamnu and Al Chet* (all Jewish Lights). She is author of *En Tenue d'Êve* (Grasset), a renewed understanding of modesty and women's bodies in Jewish thought. Rabbi Edward Feinstein is senior rabbi of Valley Beth Shalom in Encino, California. He is an instructor in the Ziegler Rabbinical School of American Jewish University and the Wexner Heritage Program. He is the author of *Tough Questions Jews Ask: A Young Adult's Guide to Building a Jewish Life* (Jewish Lights) and *Capturing the Moon*; and the editor of *Jews and Judaism in the 21st Century: Human Responsibilities, the Presence of God, and the Future of the Covenant* (Jewish Lights). He contributed to *May God Remember: Memory and Memorializing in Judaism •Yizkor, Who by Fire, Who by Water •Un'taneh Tokef and We Have Sinned: Sin and Confession in Judaism •Ashamnu and Al Chet* (all Jewish Lights). Rabbi Elie Kaunfer, named one of the top fifty Jewish leaders by *The Forward*, and one of *Newsweek's* top fifty rabbis, is co-founder and executive director of Mechon Hadar ([www.mechonhadar.org](http://www.mechonhadar.org)), an institute that empowers Jews to build vibrant Jewish communities. Mechon Hadar has launched the first full-time egalitarian yeshiva program in North America, Yeshivat Hadar ([www.yeshivathadar.org](http://www.yeshivathadar.org)), where Rabbi Kaunfer teaches

Talmud. A Dorot Fellow and Wexner Graduate Fellow, Rabbi Kaunfer co-founded Kehilat Hadar ([www.kehilathadar.org](http://www.kehilathadar.org)), an independent minyan in Manhattan committed to spirited traditional prayer, study and social action. He was selected as an inaugural Avi Chai Fellow, known as "The Jewish Genius Award."

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Rabbi Lawrence Kushner is one of the most widely read authors by people of all faiths on Jewish spiritual life. He is the best-selling author of such books as Invisible Lines of Connection: Sacred Stories of the Ordinary; God Was in This Place & I, I Did Not Know: Finding Self, Spirituality and Ultimate Meaning; Honey from the Rock: An Introduction to Jewish Mysticism; The Book of Letters: A Mystical Hebrew Alphabet; The Book of Miracles: A Young Person's Guide to Jewish Spiritual Awareness; The Book of Words: Talking Spiritual Life, Living Spiritual Talk; Eyes Remade for Wonder: A Lawrence Kushner Reader; I'm God, You're Not: Observations on Organized Religion and other Disguises of the Ego; Jewish Spirituality: A Brief Introduction for Christians; The River of Light: Jewish Mystical Awareness; The Way Into Jewish Mystical Tradition; and co-author of Because Nothing Looks Like God; How Does God Make Things Happen?; Where Is God?; What Does God Look Like?; and In God's Hands. He is the Emanu-El Scholar at San Francisco's



Congregation Emanu-El and an adjunct professor of Jewish mysticism and spirituality at Hebrew Union CollegeâJewish Institute of Religion. Rabbi Lawrence Kushner is available to speak on the following topics: • Jewish Mystical Imagination • Rymanover's Silent Aleph: What Really Happened on Sinai • Zohar on Romance and Revelation • What Makes Kabbalah Kabbalah • Sacred Stories of the Ordinary: When God Makes a Surprise Appearance in Everyday Life Click here to contact the author. Rabbi Marc Saperstein, PhD, formerly principal of Leo Baeck College, currently serves as professor of Jewish history and homiletics at Leo Baeck College and as professor of Jewish studies at King's College London. Previously he taught for twenty-nine years at three leading American universities. He has published four books on the sermon as source for Jewish history and culture, and contributed to *Who by Fire, Who by Water* • *Un'taneh Tokef, All These Vows* • *Kol Nidre and We Have Sinned: Sin and Confession in Judaism* • *Ashamnu and Al Chet* (all Jewish Lights). Rabbi Margaret Moers Wenig, DD, teaches liturgy and homiletics at Hebrew Union CollegeâJewish Institute of Religion in New York and is rabbi emerita of Beth Am, The People's Temple. She contributed to *May God Remember: Memory and Memorializing in Judaism* • *Yizkor, Who by Fire, Who by Water* • *Un'taneh Tokef, All These Vows* • *Kol Nidre, and We Have Sinned: Sin and Confession in Judaism* • *Ashamnu and Al Chet* (all Jewish Lights). Rabbi Noa Kushner is founding rabbi of The Kitchen. One part indie-Shabbat community, one part San Francisco experiment, and one part tool kit for DIY Jewish practice. The Kitchen is building a connected, spiritually alive Jewish generation and a new resonance approach to religious life. She contributed to *Who by Fire, Who by Water* • *Un'taneh Tokef, All These Vows* • *Kol Nidre and We Have Sinned: Sin and Confession in Judaism* • *Ashamnu and Al Chet* (all Jewish Lights). Rabbi Rachel Nussbaum is rabbi and executive director of the Kavana Cooperative in Seattle, Washington. She was ordained at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. She was recently awarded an Avi Chai Fellowship for her innovative approach to Jewish community building. Rabbi Ruth Durchslag, PsyD, is a rabbi and successful clinical psychologist. She is passionate about bringing Judaism to alienated and disaffected Jews who have never found a way into organized Jewish life and reaching out to anyone seeking personal meaning within Jewish tradition. She is also an avid meditator and seeks to create bridges between meditation and Judaism. Toward that end, Rabbi Durchslag is involved in founding the Center for Jewish Mindfulness in Chicago, and works in the federal prison to create interfaith programs for inmates. Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, a parent, spiritual leader, and storyteller, is the awardwinning author of *God's Paintbrush*, *In God's Name*, *God In Between* and many other inspiring books for children of all faiths and backgrounds. The second woman to be ordained as a rabbi (1974) and the first rabbi to become a

mother, she and her husband, Dennis, were the first rabbinical couple to jointly lead a congregationâ• Beth-El Zedeck in Indianapolis. They have two children, David and Debora, and three grandchildren. Sasso, who holds a doctorate in ministry, is active in the interfaith community, and has written and lectured on the renewal of spirituality and the discovery of the religious imagination in children of all faiths. Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso is available to speak on the following topics:

- Nurturing the Spiritual Imagination of Children
- Tell Me a Story: Reading the Bible and the Religious Imagination of Children
- Filling in the Blanks: How Women Read the Bible
- Women and Judaism: A Personal Journey
- Midrash as a Tool for Spiritual Reflection

Rabbi Shoshana Boyd Gelfand received her rabbinic ordination in 1993 at The Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. She has served as chief executive of the United Kingdom Movement for Reform Judaism and prior to that was vice president of the Wexner Heritage Foundation in New York. Currently she is director of JHub, an operating program of the London-based Pears Foundation. She contributed to All These Vowsâ• Kol Nidre, May God Remember: Memory and Memorializing in Judaismâ• Yizkor, and We Have Sinned: Sin and Confession in Judaismâ• Ashamnu and Al Chet (both Jewish Lights).

Rabbi Tony Bayfield, CBE, DD (Lambeth), is president of the Movement for Reform Judaism in the United Kingdom. He teaches personal theology at the Leo Baeck College in London. He contributed to We Have Sinned: Sin and Confession in Judaismâ• Ashamnu and Al Chet, Who by Fire, Who by Waterâ• Un'taneh Tokef, and All These Vowsâ• Kol Nidre (all Jewish Lights).

Rachel Farbiarz is a writer and artist living in Washington, D.C. As a D'var Tzedek Writing Fellow with American Jewish World Service, she has written on issues of social justice and Torah. She formerly worked as a lawyer, focusing on the humane treatment and civil rights of prisoners.

Ruth Messinger is the president of American Jewish World Service. She contributed to Who by Fire, Who by Waterâ• Un'taneh Tokef (Jewish Lights).

Ruth Messinger is the president and executive director of the American Jewish World Service (AJWS). Prior to assuming this role in 1998, Messinger was in public service in New York City for twenty years, including having served as Manhattan borough president. In 1997, she became the first woman to secure the Democratic Party's nomination for mayor. Messinger is currently a visiting professor at Hunter College. For the past four years, Messinger has been named the fifty most influential Jews of the year by the Forward newspaper. She contributed to Who by Fire, Who by Waterâ• Un'taneh Tokef (Jewish Lights).

Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman, PhD, has served for more than three decades as professor of liturgy at Hebrew Union Collegeâ• Jewish Institute of Religion in New York. He is a world-renowned liturgist and holder of the Stephen and Barbara Friedman Chair in Liturgy, Worship and Ritual. His work combines research in Jewish ritual, worship and spirituality with a passion for the spiritual renewal of

contemporary Judaism. He has written and edited many books, including *All the World: Universalism, Particularism and the High Holy Days*; *May God Remember: Memory and Memorializing in Judaism*; *Yizkor, We Have Sinned: Sin and Confession in Judaism*; *Ashamnu and Al Chet, Who by Fire, Who by Water*; *Un'taneh Tokef* and *All These Vows*; *Kol Nidre*, the first five volumes in the *Prayers of Awe* series; the *My People's Prayer Book: Traditional Prayers, Modern Commentaries* series, winner of the National Jewish Book Award; and he is coeditor of *My People's Passover Haggadah: Traditional Texts, Modern Commentaries* (all Jewish Lights), a finalist for the National Jewish Book Award. Rabbi Hoffman is a developer of *Synagogue 3000*, a transdenominational project designed to envision and implement the ideal synagogue of the spirit for the twenty-first century. Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman, PhD, is available to speak on the following topics: *A Day of Wine and Moses: The Passover Haggadah and the Seder You Have Always Wanted*; *Preparing for the High Holy Days: How to Appreciate the Liturgy of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur*; *The Essence of Jewish Prayer: The Prayer Book in Context and Worship in Our Time*; *Beyond Ethnicity: The Coming Project for North American Jewish Identity*; *Synagogue Change: Transforming Synagogues as Spiritual and Moral Centers for the Twenty-First Century*. [Click here to contact the author.](#)

I had a hard time getting started on reading the book. But when I truly took the time to read the book, I found that it helped me to prepare myself mentally for the Kol Nidre service. It has good discussion of the history and the variations of the prayer among the various Jewish communities. It also gave me information that better prepared me for my rabbi's discussion of the prayer and the service in the days leading up to Yom Kippur.

Good, but not what I expected. Was looking more for traditional Festival interpretations. Good discussion on the origins of the festival.

I was looking for something more like R Hammer's book... This is not quite the ticket BUT I think a good 'also have' book for the synagogue or your personal library. Especially for those who want "a flavour of...." I prefer a more in depth look at practices and the liturgy with quotes to the sources.

Remarkably, very few people understand the content, purpose, and history of what many consider Judaism's most important prayer, a recitation embroiled in controversy, a legal document that the rabbis tried to expunge from the high holiday Day of Atonement service, Kol Nidre. This book

discusses and explains Kol Nidre. What is Kol Nidre? Kol Nidre means "All these vows." It is not a prayer and is not addressed to God. It is a legal document, like one that lawyers today might draw up to protect a client from damages. It is composed very carefully in legal language, designed to annul vows by using the powers of a human court. Covering all bases, the recitation of Kol Nidre is effectuated by using the magical numbers seven and three. Kol Nidre, this book points out, "arose in the premodern world where superstition was still rampant." The earliest mention of Kol Nidre is in the mid-eighth century in Babylon where the rabbis were expressing their dislike of it. (Kol Nidre was not developed in the fourteenth century to allow Spanish Jews who were forced to promise to give up Judaism to nullify this vow, as many presume.) Since Judaism does not allow courts to adjudicate cases at night, Kol Nidre has to be recited before sundown. To highlight that it is still day, men put on the tallit before the service, for the tallit is worn during the day and not at night. Can Vows be annulled? The Bible offers no method to annul vows. Once a person makes a promise, the person must keep it, despite the consequences. This is seen in the story of Jephthah in Judges 11, where Jephthah foolishly promises to give to God "whatsoever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace" from war. He thought that an animal would greet him, but it was his daughter, his only child, that came to him and he had to give her to God. The only exception is that the Torah allowed a father or husband to cancel a woman's vow on the day he became aware of it because the Bible considered the woman's vow only effective if her father or husband agreed with it. However, in post-biblical times, the rabbis allowed the nullification of vows, under certain conditions, by a Jewish court of three. This court of three could be composed of three laymen. Thus, Kol Nidre is recited before a minimum of three men standing on the bema, the podium. Most synagogues have at least two of the men hold scrolls of the Torah - the cantor, being busy singing, is unable to also hold the Torah - to enhance the solemnity of the Kol Nidre recitation. The use of three and seven The ancients, non-Jews and Jews, thought that there is a mystical or magical quality to the numbers three and seven. Doing something three times makes the possibility of the request being effectuated more likely. Thus many Jews wash their hands three times in the morning to rid their bodies of demons that may have affected them during the night. Thus, too, Kol Nidre, its introductory few lines, and two prayers following Kol Nidre are recited three times. Seven is also seen to have powers, as when Joshua marched seven times around the city of Jericho to make it fall. Thus, the number seven is used in Kol Nidre. The use of three and seven also end the service of Yom Kippur when "Blessed is the name (meaning, existence) of His glorious kingdom for ever" is recited three times, and "The Lord is God" seven times. What does Kol Nidre say? Legal documents attempt to cover every contingency. Therefore, Kol Nidre not only requests the three-man court to

nullify vows, but any kind of promise made in any form. These include "prohibitions and oaths." In fact, Kol Nidre mention seven synonyms for vows, the last being a catchall "or any equivalent term," to end with seven. The recitation says that these should be "cancelled, nullified, powerless," using again a total of seven synonyms for annulment, including the catchall "we regret them all." Kol Nidre ends with a three-fold declaration, which may be seen as the petitioner's request or the courts decision: "The vows are not vows, the prohibitions not prohibitions, the oaths not oaths." Which oaths are we talking about, past or future ones? The middle of the recitation is different in different synagogues and the original version was one of several reasons why the rabbis disliked Kol Nidre. Some people insist that it should states that we are talking about past vows, and this was the original version; others future vows, the language that was substituted in the twelfth century; and others both, a kind of compromise. There are legal, moral, social, philosophical and other problems with each version. Kol Nidre Music Perhaps the main reason for the continued recitation of Kol Nidre today despite the rabbinical opposition and the reason why so many Jews enjoy the service is the stirring and beautiful music of Kol Nidre that haunts the congregant long after its chanting. It creates a deep religious feeling that moves the Jewish heart. The first written evidence of the melody is in 1765, although scholars think that it was probably composed in sixteenth-century Germany. Summary Kol Nidre raises many problems. How can people rid themselves of promises? What happens to the person to whom the promise is made, who relied on the promise? Doesn't this nullification create a feeling of not caring what one promises because the oath can be cancelled? What did non-Jews think about this practice? These matters are discussed, along with many other subjects, in this book. Yet, despite its true meaning, problems, and opposition, Kol Nidre's generally obscure words and its moving music create a spiritual mystique and a ceremony with many messages. It is the only service that inspires virtually every Jew to arrive in the synagogue on time to hear it. It highlights the optimistic understanding that we can and should change past errors. It reminds congregants to do so. The absence of God in the recitation and the use of a human court emphasizes that people should work with each other to improve themselves and society. It emphasizes the importance of words and relationships. It teaches people not to make oaths. It stresses that we can pray with sinners. Furthermore, the request to annul future vows can be seen as a determination to refrain from repeating mistakes in the future.

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