

Gut Yontif, everyone. It's great to see everyone IRL, in real life, and not just on Facebook. It is great to see you back in shul for Yom Kippur and I want to wish those who are fasting a tzom kal—an easy fast.

A lot of us in this room are friends on Facebook. I know all about your travels locally and abroad, your birthday celebrations, when you see Billy Joel at Madison Square Gardens, or other concerts at Jones Beach. Facebook taught me that a lot of you saw Sir Paul McCartney this past week. You share pictures of exquisite dishes at restaurants, your Mets regalia at Citifield or your Yankee hats out in the Bronx. You are often political. You love your pets. Anytime I post the back of my daughter's head, you give me a Like. Sometimes even a Love. Thanks for that!

Facebook has more than one and a half billion global users. For the few of you in the room who do not have the app on your phone or on your computer, Facebook allows people to share specific and controlled details of their lives, both in prose and with photos. ICCJ has two different Facebook pages; a main page and a separate one for young families. I share articles and upcoming events on a semi regular basis there. Follow ICCJ on Facebook!

Personally, I am very active on social media and I'm involved in a number of Facebook groups, including: the Shabbat menu planning group (where we share what we are preparing, sometimes with pictures and recipes), Rabbis Against Gun Violence (of which I am an admin), Queens NYC Mommies (I am also an admin for that group), Kosher Trader Joes and Fansens: Dear Evan Hansen Fans.

With Facebook we connect with our college and high school friends, and children and grandchildren no matter where they are. Opinions can be exchanged, we can follow happenings throughout the world and we can all live happy lives on little screens and create our own little self contained echo chambers.

A Pew study found that 67 percent of Americans use Facebook, and 44 percent of those users get their news from the site. That makes Facebook “the most influential and powerful publisher in the world,” according to Emily Bell in the *Columbia Journalism Review*.

For those of you that are active Facebook users, what are you **not** posting on social media?

How do you make that decision? How do you decide what to share about yourself?

Researchers Uski and Lampinen led a study about social media and found that people are very careful to only share content that show them in a certain light. In other words, people pick and choose what they share on Facebook and other forms of social media, so others do not find out too much about them.

There is no doubt that Facebook and other forms of social media play a transformative role in our society.

But in many ways Facebook really is FAKEBOOK. Social media updates do not represent any person in their totality.

Facebook is like a carnival mirror, but rather than making you look fatter or thinner, it just makes you look better.

Yom Kippur is a mirror that reflects the truth, even when sometimes your truth is not what you want to see. Our sacred task on Yom Kippur is to address the part of ourselves we don't share with our networks. And it is not easy to do. But that is our primary Yom Kippur goal. If you spend the day fasting and complaining about it, but don't try to come out of Yom Kippur as an improved person, then all you did was spend a day not eating.

Very few of us show our true selves, our full selves or our inner selves on Facebook.

We all have a lot of concerns-- the Mexican earthquake, the destruction in Puerto Rico, recovery following Harvey and Irma, anti semitism, US Politics, ISIS, North Korea, terror, something irritating about a neighbor, infertility, mental illness, our finances, the price of kosher brisket, getting Hamilton tickets without mortgaging our homes or illness in our families or ourselves, We often second guess ourselves. We often jump to conclusions in our heads, and we may or may not filter our thoughts and comments.

These are the sorts of things that keep us up at night.

But we don't share all of our concerns or actions on Facebook for the whole world to see. And we don't share with our adult children or our partners and spouses, or friends or colleagues. It might seem like a lot of people are "open books" but nobody really is.. We all have some activities and thoughts that we simply keep to ourselves.

Today, on this confluence of both Yom Kippur and Shabbat, we are given 25 hours to pay attention and work on our **inner** selves, the part of our person that we don't share and broadcast to our local network or to the Olam, to the world.

Our tradition acknowledges how difficult this inner work is. Therefore we are encouraged to set aside food and drink and sex and the news and make-up and showering and Facebook and the 24 hour news cycle. Instead we replace all of that noise with very specific liturgy, as carefully formulated tools to privately look inward and admit our shortcomings to ourselves.

Now, Yom Kippur, is our opportunity. I encourage all of you to say words you understand tonight and tomorrow. Please do not approach Yom Kippur prayer as a time to recite Hebrew words you don't know. Speak to God in a language you understand. The words can be so powerful.

Here is but one example:

שְׁמַע קוֹלֵנוּ. ה' אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ חוּס וְרַחֵם עָלֵינוּ. וְקַבֵּל בְּרַחֲמִים וּבְרַצוֹן אֶת תְּפִלָּתֵנוּ.

Hear our voice, Adonai our God and be kind and have compassion for us. Willingly and lovingly accept our prayer. Because today we are making it real. Today we focus on the aspects of ourselves that we would never post to Facebook.

Take the gift of Yom Kippur, just one day, to focus on the secret thoughts and behaviors we do **when we think that no one is watching**.

Nearly all of us cut corners, make excuses and don't always act entirely morally or according to the laws or societal norms and standards.

When you shop at a grocery store do you return your grocery cart every single time, like you're supposed to in the designated area, or do you just leave it and hope that it doesn't roll into the side of someone's car?

In a public restroom, when you dry your hands and toss the paper towel into the bin, if it hits the dirty floor, do you automatically pick it up or leave it on the ground?

When you're browsing through a rack at Marshalls or Macy's and something falls off a hanger, do you pick it up and pretend it didn't happen, thinking "That's someone else's job"?

Yes, these are relatively small things, but if you have done any of them-did you keep it to yourself or did you instagram it for your followers to see? Did you post "just dropped pile of dresses at TJ Maxx" on Facebook? Of course not. ¹

If we have done any of these things, then it is time to CONFESS.

Confession is a big and heavy word, but that is what we are supposed to do on Yom Kippur.

In between the Al Chets we will recite the phrase *V'al Kulam, Elokei Selichot, selakh lanu, m'hal lanu, kaper lanu*, -for all these sins, forgiving God, forgive us, pardon us, and grant us atonement over and over again.

If you stay with us all day tomorrow or take a brief break and come back for mincha and then Neilah, then you **know** it is not easy to confess multiple times in one day.

For each time we say these words, we are reminded again and again of our many faults.

It is uncomfortable to confess our secret shortcomings because this is not what we usually focus on. We dig this part of who we are so deep inside. We don't want others to know about this aspect of who we are. But the liturgy of the day forces us to pay attention.

We obviously didn't update Facebook about the time we honked at someone when there was no need, or when we got frustrated with a family member and wondered for a brief moment how life would be without him or her, or when

¹ <https://colettecarlson.com/are-you-accountable-even-when-no-ones-looking/>

we ignored the homeless person--but today our task is to we remember those moments and commit not to repeat those behaviors.

Dr Annette Boeckler of Leo Baeck College in London writes that there are six different ways for us to understand confession in Judaism. They are: To repair the world, to justify God, to create community among Jews, to create community within humanity, as a form of poetry and what I believe we do on Yom Kippur the most: confessing sins to improve oneself. The Ashamnu and Al Chets prayers are our psychotherapeutical tools for personal growth. Our Yom Kippur liturgy acts as our moral compass for character improvement.

Yom Kippur's full name is *Yom Hakippurim* which means a day just like Purim. Now if you have ever been in this room on Purim, then you experienced a much different tone and mood. So how is today *k'purim*, like Purim? Actually they are polar opposites, but they share one important aspect. On Purim we wear masks whereas today is the day we take our masks off.

Perhaps you have heard of this Billy Joel lyric:

Well, we all have a face
That we hide away forever
And we take them out
And show ourselves when everyone has gone

Pretend everyone is gone. That is the part of ourselves we are meant to focus on today.

In his Mishneh Torah (*Hilkhot Teshuva* 2:2) Maimonides writes :

<p>ומה היא התשובה? הוא שיעזוב החוטא חטאו, ויסירו ממחשבתו, ויגמור בלבו שלא יעשהו עוד... וכן יתנחם על שעבר.</p>	<p>What is <i>teshuva</i>? It is when the sinner abandons his (particular form of) sin, removes it from his thoughts, and determines in his heart not to do it again... and, so too, he regrets what happened in the past.</p>
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On Yom Kippur we acknowledge. Confess. Regret and Pledge not to do or think that way again in the future.

As Rabbi Jonathan Sacks explains, Yom Kippur "is a day not just of confession and forgiveness but of a profound liberation. Atonement means that we can begin again. We are not held captive by the past, by our failures. The book is open and God invites us, his hand guiding us-- the way a scribe guides the hand of those who write a letter in a Torah scroll, to write a new chapter." Rabbi Sacks frames the work we have to in a loving approach. Notice how he uses the words "we" and "us."

Perhaps reaching our deepest self is slightly less difficult to do in shul on Yom Kippur because we are all doing it together. It is not just the person in row G, seat 3. We are all in it together. It is every Jew's duty today to probe deep.

The confessional statements are all stated in the plural form. "We abuse. We betray. We are cruel. We destroy. We embitter. We falsify. We gossip. We hate. We insult."

If you are immune to these, the list goes on. **You** might be immune, but there are people who have done some of these things this year, and that is why this carefully crafted list exists.

Rabbi Eliezer says in the Talmud (b. *Sanh.* 97b):

אם ישראל עושין תשובה
נגאלין ואם לאו אין נגאלין.

If Israel repents, they will be redeemed, and if not, they won't be redeemed.

God wants us to grow and change and to teshuva and be the best versions of ourselves. **God** wants us to do this work today.

We are given the chance each year to return and renew. That is the gift of Yom Kippur.

For some people just showing up, just setting foot in shul, gets the whole process going. For others we need to hear a certain prayer to evoke a memory or a mood to set a chain of thought in motion. Perhaps seeing an old friend or a new baby is what makes you stop and look inside.

Whenever you feel the spark, light the match to foster introspection. Put your machzor down if you need. Go for a walk around the block. But please, don't post about it on Facebook. This is just for you, not public consumption.

In about 24 hours the gates will close, Neilah will end, we hear the shofar, smell the spices and see the flame of the Havdallah candle.

Between now and then,

- check in with yourself.
- assess your internal likes and dislikes.
- Visit past memories during services, especially at Yizkor.
- Share with others in person.
- But leave social media behind today.

And then once Yom Kippur is over, charge your phones back up and tell everyone you had the best Yom Kippur ever, you engaged in introspection and how thrilled you are to be back--better than ever! Hashtag blessed!

Instagram those break fast bagels. Tweet that the rabbi's sermon was less than 20 minutes! Share pictures of cats and kids and rainbows.

And, with God's help we will all meet here again next year.

May we all be inscribed in the book of life.