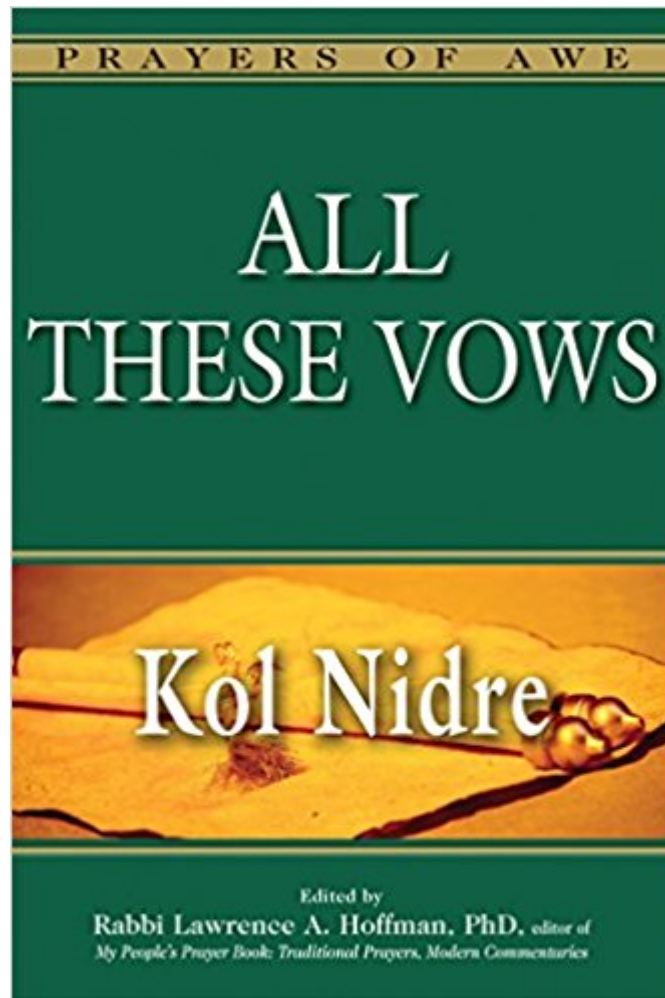




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# All These Vows: Kol Nidre (Prayers Of Awe)



## Synopsis

The most memorable prayer of the Jewish New Year—what it means, why we sing it, and the secret of its magical appeal. Through a series of lively commentaries, over thirty contributors—men and women, scholars and rabbis, artists and poets, spanning three continents and all major Jewish denominations—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 it—call 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 everyone—whether experienced worshipers or guests who encounter Jewish prayer for the very first time.

Contributors: Rabbi Tony Bayfield, CBE, DD — Dr. Annette M. Boeckler — Dr. Marc Zvi Brettler — Dr. Erica Brown — Dr. Eliezer Diamond — Rabbi Ruth Durchslag, PsyD — Rachel Farbiarz — Rabbi Edward Feinstein — Rabbi Shoshana Boyd Gelfand — Rabbi Andrew Goldstein, PhD — Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman, PhD — Rabbi Delphine Horvilleur — Rabbi Elie Kaunfer — Rabbi Karyn D. Kedar — Dr. Reuven Kimelman — Dr. Mark Kligman — Rabbi Lawrence Kushner — Rabbi Noa Kushner — Rabbi Daniel Landes — Liz Lerman — Catherine Madsen — Rabbi Jonathan Magonet, PhD — Rabbi Dalia Marx, PhD — Ruth Messinger — Rabbi Charles H. Middleburgh, PhD — Rabbi Rachel Nussbaum — Rabbi Aaron Panken, PhD — Rabbi Marc Saperstein, PhD — Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso — Rabbi Jonathan P. Slater, DMin — Rabbi David Stern — Rabbi David A. Teutsch, PhD — Dr. Ellen M. Umansky — Rabbi Margaret Moers Wenig, DD — Dr. Ron Wolfson — Rabbi Daniel G. Zemel — 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 College – 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*

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professor of Jewish musicology at Hebrew Union College – 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, *Maqam and Liturgy: Ritual, Music and Aesthetics of Syrian Jews in Brooklyn*. Dr. 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*

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Water – Un'taneh Tokef; and All These Vows – Kol Nidre (all Jewish Lights). 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 College – 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 – ctaneh 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 College – 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

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Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, a parent, spiritual leader, and storyteller, is the award-winning 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 congregation, 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 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* (both Jewish Lights).

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Rachel Farbiarz is a writer and artist living in Washington, D.C. As a D'var Tzedek Writing Fellow with

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Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman, PhD, has served for more than three decades as professor of liturgy at Hebrew Union College and the 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* and *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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