

SUPPLEMENT

כל נדרי - *A Weapon Of Anti-Semitism*

Several contributors to the book: All These Vows, Kol Nidre, Dr. Lawrence Hoffman, editor, Jewish Lights Publishing, 2011, referred to the fact that over the centuries, the practice of Jews entering the synagogue on **יום כיפור** and asking by way of **כל נדרי**, that G-d cancel any vows or promises that will be made (and in some versions, those that had been made), opened the door for Anti-Semites to question the value of a promise or an oath made by a Jew. This resulted in special forms of oaths being created specifically for Jews; i.e. "Oath More Judaica"; some refer to it as "Oath More Judaico". I have attached some background material on this issue, including a sample of one such oath.

Jewish Worship by Abraham E. Millgram, The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1971, p. 244:

ATTACKS AGAINST THE KOL NIDRE PRAYER

No sooner was the *Siddur* subjected to the scrutiny of the censors than the Jews were called upon to defend the Kol Nidre prayer, which is recited on the eve of the Day of Atonement. This prayer, as indicated earlier, is an expression of Jewish piety at its best. Before a Jew dares to appear before God with his supplications on the holiest day of the year, he is overcome by a sense of unworthiness, because he may have inadvertently violated a vow during the past year. The Kol Nidre does not deal with vows between man and man; these can be absolved only by the person to whom the vow was made. The Kol Nidre is concerned only with vows between man and God. It is for these private vows that the Jew seeks absolution before he starts the Yom Kippur services. But the inquisitors, guided by Jewish apostates, saw in this prayer evidence that the Jew cunningly absolves himself of all vows and thus enables himself to renege on promises and oaths. According to these accusations, the Kol Nidre prayer enables the Jew to defraud his unsuspecting neighbors. It should therefore be expurgated from the synagogue liturgy.

The Jews vigorously denied these accusations. But denials, however well documented, did not stop the accusations from being revived from time to time. As early as the thirteenth century, during a public disputation forced upon the Jews, Rabbi Jehiel of Paris and several other rabbis had to face a Jewish apostate, Nicholas Donin, and refute his charge that the Kol Nidre prayer enables the Jews to defraud the Gentiles. Commentaries have been included in the prayer books reminding the worshipers that the Kol Nidre applies only to private oaths. Nonetheless, these attacks were repeated with such monotony that in modern times the Reform Jews decided to eliminate this prayer altogether. But this attempt

has not succeeded. In the vast majority of synagogues the Kol Nidre has not only remained an integral part of the Yom Kippur service, but also has retained its powerful appeal to the heart of the Jewish worshiper.

The Jewish Religion, A Companion, Louis Jacobs, Oxford University Press, 1995, page 307

Kol Nidre 'All vows', the opening words of the declaration, largely in Aramaic, at the beginning of the evening service on *Yom Kippur in which all vows that will be uttered in the coming year are declared null and void. The declaration applies only to religious vows and has no effect on oaths taken in a court of law. If a person makes a vow, say, to deny himself wine for a certain period, perhaps as a penance, he must keep his promise, which is thought of as a promise to G-d. But this applies only if the vow is uttered with full intent. A person's declaration beforehand that all vows he will take in the year ahead are null and void means that any vow he will make is held to be without sufficient intention and hence without binding power. Because it was falsely assumed that Kol Nidre does apply to oaths taken in the court, Jews were suspected of unreliability in this matter and in a number of countries the infamous More Judaica, a special humiliating form of oath, was introduced when a Jew had to swear in court. Zechariah Frankel and others in nineteenth-century Germany exposed the falsehood and explained the true meaning of Kol Nidre. In the Middle Ages a number of Rabbinic authorities were opposed to the Kol Nidre on the grounds that its effectiveness to nullify vows was very questionable. Yet the Kol Nidre is still recited in the majority of congregations, the night of Yom Kippur being referred to as 'Kol Nidre Night'. There is no doubt that it is the famous traditional melody, with its note of remorse, contrition, hope, and triumph, that has saved the Kol Nidre. Reform congregations often substitute a Psalm for the Kol Nidre formulation but retain the melody. The usual practice is for the Reader to chant the formula three times, raising his voice each time. An interpretation given to the Kol Nidre is that the congregation declares, by implication, at the beginning of Yom Kippur: "See, O Lord, what miserable sinners we are. We make promises to live better lives each year and yet always fall far short of keeping them. Therefore, help us, O Lord, and pardon us for our shortcomings."

J. H. Hertz, "Kol Nidre", in his *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs* (London, 1960), 730-1.

Jewish History Sourcebook:

An Oath Taken by Jews Frankfort on the Main, about 1392 CE

<http://www.fordham.edu/Halsall/jewish/jewishsbok.asp#The Jewish Middle Ages>

In matters requiring an oath before the civil authorities the medieval Jew did not employ the same formula as the Christian or Muslim. The reason is obvious: the state was Christian or Muslim, and no Jew could or would swear after the Christian or Muslim manner. In a

Christian land this would have meant a recognition of Jesus or the Trinity. Such an oath would not have been binding on the Jew and hence was never imposed. For the convenience of the Jew, therefore, an oath "according to the Jewish custom" (more judaico) was instituted. One of the oldest surviving authentic oaths of this type was promulgated by the Byzantine emperor, Constantine VII (912-959), but in all probability this type is still older. This Byzantine formula, which is probably based on a Hebrew or Aramaic original, was employed, with considerable variations, in most European lands during the Middle Ages.

In the course of time, as prejudice against the Jew grew, the belief became widespread among Christians that Jews would not hesitate to perjure themselves in Christian courts. To counteract this presumed tendency, the various cities and states, particularly in Germany and France, began to make the oaths more formidable and more shocking both in language and in accompanying ceremonial, hoping thereby to frighten the Jews into telling the truth. It was but a step from intimidation to humiliation and to mild torture: Jews had to wear crowns of thorns on their necks and around their knees, and long thorn branches were pulled between their legs while the oath was being administered (France, eleventh century).

The manner of administering the oath varied in different localities. In spite of the emancipation of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the oath, "according to the Jewish custom," persisted in France till 1846, in Prussia till 1869, in Roumania till 1912. It is needless to say that Jews have always resented this type of oath, especially because of the presumption implicit in it that the Jew is a perjurer.

The following formula, originally in Middle High German, was used in Frankfort on the Main about 1392. However, there were other oaths imposed on Jews in Frankfort on the Main at this time and in other cities and states, too, that were milder and more dignified. A special oath for Jews was still used in the police-courts of Frankfort as late as 1847- (See JE, "Oath more judaico.")

This Is Indeed An Oath For Jews, How They Shall Take An Oath

The Jew shall stand on a sow's skin and the five books of Master Moses shall lie before him, and his right hand up to the wrist shall lie on the book and he shall repeat after him who administers the oath of the Jews:

Regarding such property of which the man accuses you, you know nothing of it nor do you have it. You never had it in your possession, you do not have it in any of your chests, you have not buried it in the earth, nor locked it with locks, so help you G-d who created heaven and earth, valley and hill, woods, trees, and grass, and so help you the law which G-d himself created and wrote with His own hand and gave Moses on Sinai's mount. And so help you the five books of Moses that you may nevermore enjoy a bite without soiling yourself all over as did the King of Babylon.

And may that sulphur and pitch flow down upon your neck that flowed over Sodom and Gomorrah, and the same pitch that flowed over Babylon flow over you, but two hundred times more, and may the earth envelope and swallow you up as it did Dathan and Abiram. And may your dust never join other dust, and your earth never join other earth in the bosom of Master Abraham if what you say is not true and right. [This refers either to a decent burial or to resurrection.] And so help you A-donai you have sworn the truth.

If not, may you become as leprous as Naaman and Gehazi, and may the calamity strike you that the Israelite people escaped as they journeyed forth from Egypt's land. And may a bleeding and a flowing come forth from you and never cease, as your people wished upon themselves when they condemned god, J. C., among themselves, and tortured Him and said [Matthew 27:25]: "His blood be upon us and our children." It is true, so help you G-d who appeared to Moses in a burning bush which yet remained unconsumed. It is true by the oath that you have sworn, by the soul which you bring on the Day of Judgment before the Court, [before the G-d of] Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is true, so help you G-d and the oath you have sworn [Amen].