

Dear Community, Family, and Friends,

We are approaching the holiest day on our calendar. On this day, Jews around the world will fill synagogues to bow their heads in prayer, to lift their hearts with hope, and to turn their eyes toward G-d. Together, we will shatter the walls that divide us as we unite in prayer and confession. We will commit to positive change and personal growth.

Yet will all the best intentions, as the fall and winter wear on, we may find ourselves slipping back into negative behaviors that we had vowed to abandon. In fact, many of us may feel confident that this is exactly what will happen. What, then, is the reason for Yom Kippur? Why do we pray and confess with such intention, when deep down in our hearts we don't have faith in our own resolutions?

Yom Kippur is commonly thought of as a day of repentance, when we apologize for and rid ourselves of all our bad thoughts, words and actions of the previous year. However Yom Kippur includes another element as well. This day, a day of simple prayer and fasting, strips away all our materialistic adornment and exposes the hidden Divine spark that exists within each Jew. This Divine spark is the source of our desire to cleave to G-d and on Yom Kippur the 'pilot light' is cleansed so that the flames can shine bigger and brighter.

Though our rational minds may resign themselves to an eventual lapse of our good intentions, Yom Kippur nevertheless offers us a once-a-year opportunity to

bare ourselves to G-d and rekindle the flame that drives us to serve G-d and to love our fellow man.

It is true that change does not come easy and that we may fall back into bad habits. However this frailty of human nature does not negate the value of Yom Kippur. Each year as we confess our sins, we gain an additional measure of self-knowledge and awareness. This introspection and subsequent self-growth, fanned by the flames of our rekindled Divine spark, allow us to more confidently commit to our New Year's resolutions.

The boxer Cus D'Amanto once said, "To see a man beaten not by a better opponent but by himself is a tragedy." Let us draw on our own self-knowledge and G-d's merciful assistance to overcome our own human frailties as we strive to do a little more and be a little better this year.

I would like to wish you all a year of growth and positive change. May G-d grant you the strength to do what you need to do and the wisdom to know how. Hashem should bless us all with happiness, and fill our world with peace.

Shlomo Agishtein