



Where Will You Be for the Holiday Prayers?

Across Israel, preparations are already underway for the Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur services. During this season in Israel, shuls overflow and many new prayer gatherings open—in kibbutzim, in city squares, and even in tents along the streets.

This week, Yonatan Levy, a hi-tech professional from Givat Shmuel, sent me the following story:

“For several years now, I have been joining the Yom Kippur prayers at Kibbutz Nir Oz in the Gaza periphery. The kibbutz members are joined by a group of religious Jews from Givat Shmuel and Jerusalem, together with alumni of the Hesder Yeshiva in Elon Moreh.

On erev Yom Kippur, dozens of kibbutz residents would come for *Kol Nidrei*, and the following day, at the fast’s conclusion, many would gather to hear Amotz, a kibbutz member, blow the shofar. The joy would peak when everyone—religious and secular, old-timers and youth—danced together and sang *L’shana Haba’a B’Yerushalayim Habnuyah* and *Asher Bachar Banu Mikol Ha’amim*. Even the children would come,

wide-eyed, as the air filled with the sound of the shofar.

Each year, we tried to bring a *kohen* so that everyone could hear Birkat Kohanim. But on our last Yom Kippur there, in 5784 (2023), we couldn’t find one—until we suddenly remembered Ravid Katz, a local resident who came every year for the *Ne’ilah* prayer. We asked if he could come that year for *Shacharit* as well, to lift his hands and bless the congregation. Ravid hesitated at first but eventually agreed.

When he arrived in the morning, we understood his hesitation. It was the first time in his life he had ever been asked to give Birkat Kohanim. He turned to Binyamin, one of the organizers, and asked him to explain the order of the blessing.

The moment was moving beyond words: a simple, kind, humble man, standing there for the very first time, raising his hands to bless the congregation with the ancient words: “May the Lord bless you and protect you. May the Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord turn His face toward you and grant you peace.” That moment is forever engraved in our hearts.

Only a week and a half later, on October 7th, Ravid fought heroically with the kibbutz emergency squad—and fell in battle. His body was taken to Gaza and later returned in a military operation. Ravid worked with at-risk youth, was a devoted father, and so much more could be said about his remarkable character.

When I went to comfort his family, they told me how deeply moved he had been on that

Yom Kippur, just days before his murder, to deliver Birkat Kohanim. It was clear to me that this was no ordinary blessing but a final gift he left us all—a message of unity, a moment of holiness before his soul ascended to heaven.

This year, we are once again organizing a joint *minyán* with members of Kibbutz Nachal Oz, now based in Kiryat Gat. The ties have remained and even strengthened. This Yom Kippur, Birkat Kohanim will be dedicated to the memory of Ravid Katz, our *kohen*, who blessed us only once in his life.” ■

Sivan Rahav-Meir is a media personality and lecturer. Married to Yedidya, the mother of five. Lives in Jerusalem, and formerly served as the World Mizrahi Shlichah to North America. Sivan lectures in Israel and overseas about the media, Judaism, Zionism and new media. She was voted by Globes newspaper as most popular female media personality in Israel and by the Jerusalem Post as one of the 50 most influential Jews in the world.

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