



## MIDEI CHODESH B'CHODSHO

RABBI SHMUEL GOLDIN

FACULTY, OU ISRAEL

RABBI EMERITUS, CONGREGATION AHAVATH TORAH, ENGLEWOOD NJ

YOM KIPPUR

# Prolonged Prayer

As the end of Yom Kippur draws near, an extraordinary event occurs.

We add an additional prayer service to our liturgy; a prayer service that, for centuries, has been recited at no other time of the year.<sup>1</sup>

Known as Ne'ila (Closing), this prayer service draws its title, according to the Talmud, from two possible sources.

The closing of the Temple gates as night approaches.

The closing of the “Heavenly Gates” as Yom Kippur nears its end.

Absent the Temple, the first of these two sources remains rooted in memories of past glory and in the hope of future redemption.

For the present, Ne'ila is the prayer service that ends the holiest day of the year; the vehicle through which we set forth our final petitions before the closing of the “Heavenly Gates.”

In the Talmud Yerushalmi, Rabbi Levi

derives the unique character of Ne'ila from an unexpected source, a harsh rebuke uttered by the prophet Yeshayahu:

“And when you spread your hands [in prayer], I will hide my eyes from you; *even if you were to prolong your prayer*, I will not listen; your hands are replete with blood.

Rabbi Levi maintains that Yeshayahu's severe words convey a secondary message: Under normal circumstances, “*All who prolong their prayers will be answered.*”

*Ne'ila thus represents a prolongation of our tefillot on the holiest of our days.*

The Rambam codifies this approach in his halachic work, the *Mishneh Torah*, by explaining that the Rabbis “instituted a prayer after the Mincha prayer, close to the setting of the sun, on fast days only, *its purpose being to increase supplication and pleading* because of the fast. This is called the Ne'ila prayer, as if to say the Gates of Heaven are closing and concealed behind the sun.”

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, centuries later, takes things a step further. He posits that Ne'ila's unique character as “a prolongation of prayer” sets it apart from all other tefillot. Ne'ila, the Rav maintains, is *an extension of existing prayer*. Specifically, Ne'ila is an extension of the Yom Kippur tefillot that precede it; dedicated to the request that all previous tefillot of Yom Kippur be accepted by G-d.

The Rav continues by suggesting that the addition of Ne'ila to the Yom Kippur service

1. The Talmud Bavli ([Yoma 87b]) notes that Ne'ila was originally recited on two occasions in addition to Yom Kippur: on public fast days and at *Ma'amadot* (town gatherings of Israelites connected to the twenty-four watches of Kohanim and Leviim who in turn served in performing the Temple service). Beginning with the Geonic period, however, following the close of the Talmudic Era, the recitation became limited to Yom Kippur, alone.

transforms Yom Kippur into a “Yom Tefillah”, “a day of prayer”. In this way, prayer on Yom Kippur becomes fundamentally and qualitatively different from prayer recited during the rest of the year.

Based on this idea, Rabbi Soloveichik arrives at a dramatic halachic conclusion...

“If an individual slept through the entire day of Yom Kippur; failed to recite Shacharit, Musaf, and Mincha; and then came to synagogue at the time of Ne’ila’s recitation, he would be precluded from reciting Ne’ila.”

Participation in the Ne’ila Service, the Rav maintains, is dependent upon involvement in the preceding prayers. *Absent those tefillot, Ne’ila has no place.*

Going one step further, despite his own father’s uncertainty concerning this point, the Rav argues that if an individual misses the recitation of even one of the three preceding prayer services, he is precluded from reciting Ne’ila.

While, on a practical level, the Rav’s position concerning the Ne’ila prayer is disputed by many other authorities, the idea he raises can be very instructive.

Drawing on the Rav’s insights, we may suggest an answer to a puzzling Yom Kippur question, arriving at a compelling conclusion about the day as a whole.

The Torah concludes its commandment concerning Yom Kippur observance with the enigmatic statement, “from evening to evening, you shall observe your Shabbat.”

Why must the Torah delineate Yom Kippur’s day-long flow? After all, every day on the Jewish calendar begins in the evening and ends in the evening!

Armed with our new understanding of the Neila prayer, we can offer an answer to

this question.

*It is absolutely fitting that the final prayer service of this holiest of days might be dependent upon the prayers that precede it.*

Yom Kippur must be experienced “from evening to evening,” in its totality. There can be no halfway measures when it comes to this holiest of our days. Each of us must be in “for the long haul.” Only by participating in the *entirety of the day* -- “from evening to evening” -- do we earn the right to stand before God as the Gates of Heaven begin to close.

And, if this is the case, the closing moments of our calendar’s holiest day inform Jewish experience in its entirety...

*Judaism does not believe in “quick fixes.”  
The quest for spirituality is hard work.*

Only those who are willing to put in the effort, day after day; only those who rise up to pray, even when the spirit does not move them; only those who perform the everyday mitzvot of our tradition, day in and day out; will ultimately merit the encounter with the Divine that Jewish tradition can uniquely offer. ■

Rabbi Goldin is the author of the  
OU Press volumes "Unlocking the Torah Text,"  
and "Unlocking the Haggada."

## LIFE SETTLEMENTS

Do you have a life insurance policy you:

- No longer want?
- No longer need?
- Can no longer afford the premium?
  - Could you use extra money instead of keeping your policy?

**I can guarantee that if you qualify with the underwriting process I can get you more money than if you cash it in with the company.**

Please contact Moshe Russell at:  
Buymypolicy32@gmail.com