



Yom Kippur

Kol Nidre Reminds Us Who We Are

Yom Kippur, the holiest day on the Jewish calendar, begins on Sunday evening with the Kol Nidre service. This year it will be a particularly poignant one for British Jews, as we mark the first anniversary of the terrorist attack on Heaton Park Synagogue in Manchester.

“Kol Nidre” – which means “all vows” – is a service steeped in tradition and emotion. Many believe it was born in some of the darkest periods of Jewish history, composed as a remedy for Jews who had been forced, on pain of death, to publicly renounce their faith. Today, Kol Nidre remains as an annual declaration before God of what and who we truly are, beneath whatever the world has wanted us to say or practise.

That idea feels counter-cultural in the social media era.

According to Deloitte's Digital Consumer Trends survey, 62% of young people say that social media is their preferred way to communicate, but 43% believe it is harmful to their health. And a study published this summer found that the more carefully people curate their image online, the less satisfaction they take in the actual experience they are documenting. Performing your life for others can have the effect of hollowing it out.

We have built technologies that actively reward visibility and the approval of others.

For many, the performance is no longer something they consciously put on and take off.

In the prayers of Yom Kippur, we say to God: “You know the hidden secrets of every living soul. You search the innermost chambers of the conscience and the heart. Nothing is hidden from Your sight.”

We are reintroduced to the purest version of ourselves. Not the version we show to others, nor what we consciously conceal. But the version beneath it all. The Kol Nidre service highlights the difference between perceived greatness and true greatness. Perceived greatness comes from the ability to give the best possible impression, but true greatness is achieved when we genuinely become the best possible version of ourselves.

Over the past year, I have been deeply inspired by the members of the Heaton Park Jewish community. Away from the cameras, the public statements and commendations, they have stood tall, strengthening their resolve to lead upright, selfless and decent lives, always being proud of their true identity, while refusing to be defined by what was done to them.

On this Yom Kippur, as we remember who we really are, the Heaton Park community reminds us all how true greatness is achieved by ordinary people who quietly live extraordinary lives.