

Objects of Awe: The Meaning of the High Holidays Through Treasures
from the JTS Library
LOVE AND FEAR

Dehilu u-Rehimu: Sources for the High Holidays

I. Before the King: Fear, Majesty, and Judgment

From the High Holiday Amidah

וּבָכָן תֵּן פִּחְדְּךָ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ עַל כָּל מַעֲשֶׂיךָ, וְאִימָתְךָ עַל כָּל מָה שִׁבְרָאתָ

“And so, O LORD our God, place Your fear upon all Your works, and Your dread upon all that You have created.”

וְתִמְלוֹךְ אַתָּה ה' לְבִדְךָ עַל כָּל מַעֲשֶׂיךָ

“And may You alone, O LORD, reign over all Your works.”

The King Girded in Might

From *Melekh Azur Gevurah*, a Rosh Hashanah liturgical poem attributed to Rabbi
Eleazar ha-Qallir:

מֶלֶךְ אָזוּר גִּבּוֹר
גָּדוֹל שִׁמְךָ בְּגִבּוֹרָה
לְךָ זְרוּעַ עִם גִּבּוֹרָה

“King girded in might;
great is Your name in might;
Yours is the arm of might.”

מֶלֶךְ בְּגִדֵי נִקְּם

לְבִשׁ בְּיוֹם נָקָם
לְצַרְיוֹ יָשִׁיב אֶל חֵיקָם

“King who wears garments of vengeance,
clothed for the day of vengeance,
who returns recompense upon His enemies.”

מֶלֶךְ גָּאוֹת לְבִשׁ
יָמִים מִיָּבֶשׁ
וְגָאוֹת אֲפִיקִים מְכַבֵּשׁ

“King clothed in majesty,
who dries up seas
and subdues the pride of the channels.”

מֶלֶךְ בַּעֲשָׂרָה לְבוּשִׁים
הַתְּאֲזָר בְּקִדּוּשִׁים
אֶל נַעֲרָץ בְּסוֹד קִדּוּשִׁים

“King who girded Himself in ten garments among the holy ones;
God revered in the council of the holy ones.”

God Clothed in Majesty

Psalms 93:1

ה' מֶלֶךְ גָּאוֹת לְבִשׁ
לְבִשׁ ה' עַז הַתְּאֲזָר

“The LORD reigns; He is clothed in majesty;
the LORD is clothed, girded with strength.”

Isaiah 59:17

וַיִּלְבַּשׁ צְדָקָה כְּשָׂרָיו
וַיִּכְוֶעַ יְשׁוּעָה בְּרֹאשׁוֹ
וַיִּלְבַּשׁ בְּגָדֵי נָקָם תְּלַבְּשֵׁת
וַיַּעַט כְּמַעִיל קִנְיָה

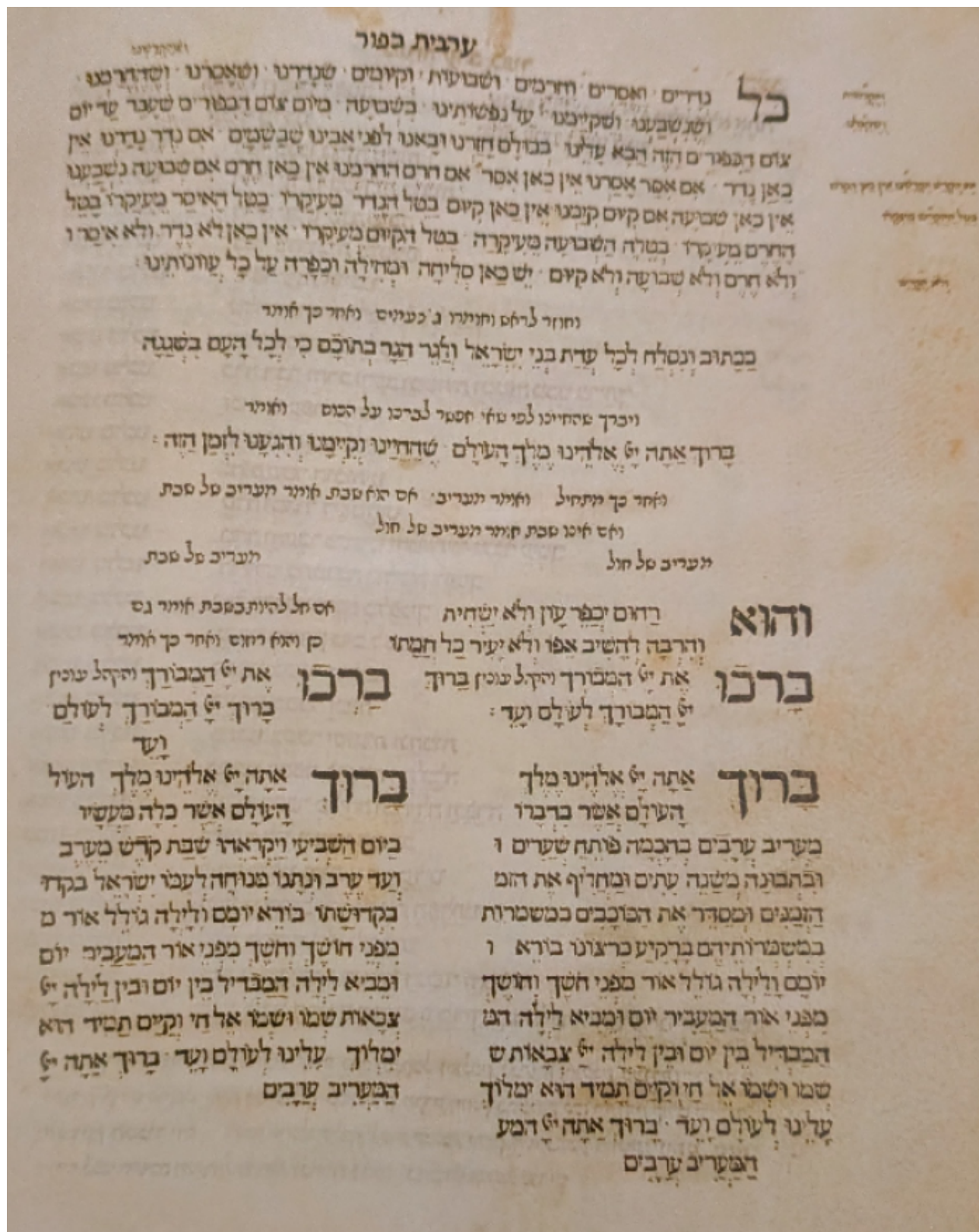
“He put on righteousness like armor
and a helmet of salvation upon His head;
He put on garments of vengeance as clothing
and wrapped Himself in zeal like a cloak.”

Explore the Collection

The Bamberg Mahzor, 1279

We will visit the JTS Library website to examine the manuscript itself: the monumental word Melekh (“King”), its richly decorated architectural frame, and the cantorial and liturgical annotations left by generations of worshippers.

Most Jewish communities know the declaration recited on the eve of Yom Kippur by its Aramaic opening words, Kol Nidrei (“All Vows”). The Roman Jewish tradition preserves a distinctive Hebrew form of the declaration. The following is a Hebrew rendering of the traditional formula:



כָּל הַנִּדְרִים וְהַחֲרָמִים וְהָאִסּוּרִים וְהַקִּיּוּמִים וְהַשְּׁבוּעוֹת, אֲשֶׁר נִדְרְנוּ וְהַחֲרַמְנוּ וְאִסְרְנוּ עַל
נַפְשׁוֹתֵינוּ, וְאֲשֶׁר הִתְפַּסְנוּ בְּקִוְיָנוּ וְנִשְׁבַּעְנוּ עַל נַפְשׁוֹתֵינוּ, מִיּוֹם הַכְּפוּרִים שֶׁעָבַר עַד יוֹם הַכְּפוּרִים
הַזֶּה — בְּכֻלָּם אֲנַחְנוּ מִתְחַרְטִים. כָּלֵם יְהִי מִתָּרִים, עֲזוּבִים, בְּטָלִים וּמִבְטָלִים, לֹא שְׂרִירִים וְלֹא קִיּוּמִים.
נִדְרֵינוּ לֹא יְהִי נִדְרִים, וְאִסְרֵינוּ לֹא יְהִי אִסּוּרִים, וְשְׁבוּעוֹתֵינוּ לֹא יְהִי שְׁבוּעוֹת

“All the vows, bans, prohibitions, pledges, obligations, and oaths that we have vowed, declared, imposed upon ourselves, undertaken, affirmed, or sworn upon ourselves, from the Yom Kippur that has passed until this Yom Kippur—we regret them all. Let them all be released, abandoned, void, and annulled, without force and without effect. Let our vows not be vows, our prohibitions not be prohibitions, and our oaths not be oaths.”

כָּאֲשֶׁר כָּתוּב בַּתּוֹרָה:

וְנִסְלַח לְכָל עֲדַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלַגֵּר הַגֵּר בְּתוֹכָם, כִּי לְכָל הָעָם בְּשִׁגְגָה

“As it is written in Your Torah: ‘The entire congregation of the children of Israel shall be forgiven, as well as the stranger who dwells among them, for the entire people acted unwittingly.’”

Numbers 15:26

סָלַח נָא לַעֲוֹן הָעָם הַזֶּה כְּגֹדֶל חֶסֶדְךָ, וְכַאֲשֶׁר נִשְׁאַתָּה לָעָם הַזֶּה מִמִּצְרַיִם וְעַד הַנֵּה

“Please forgive the transgression of this people according to the greatness of Your lovingkindness, just as You have forgiven this people from Egypt until now.”

Numbers 14:19

וְנֶאֱמַר:

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' סָלַחְתִּי כְדִבְרְךָ

“And there it is said: ‘The LORD said: I have forgiven according to your word.’”

Numbers 14:20

“Who Completed His Work on the Seventh Day”

The Roman rite also preserves a distinctive form of the evening blessing for the Sabbath, a version known from the prayer book of Rav Saadiah Gaon:

בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר כָּלָה מַעֲשָׂיו בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי, וַיְקַרְאֵהוּ עֵנֶג שַׁבָּת, קִדְּשׁוֹ מִעֶרֶב עַד
עֶרֶב, הִתְקִין מְנוּחָה לְעַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּרִצּוֹנוֹ, גּוֹלֵל אוֹר מִפְּנֵי חֹשֶׁךְ וְחֹשֶׁךְ מִפְּנֵי אוֹר. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' הַמַּעֲרִיב
עֶרְבִים.

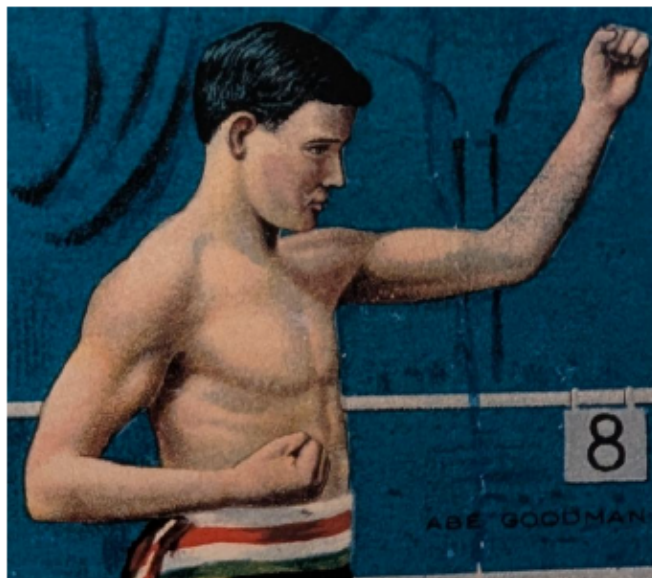
“Blessed are You, LORD our God, King of the universe, who completed His works on the seventh day and called it the delight of the Sabbath; who sanctified it from evening to evening and established rest for His people Israel according to His will; who rolls away light before darkness and darkness before light. Blessed are You, LORD, who brings on the evenings.”

Explore the Collection

Roman Rite Maḥzor, Soncino and Casalmaggiore, 1485–1486

We will visit the JTS Library website to examine this extraordinarily early Hebrew printed book and see how the new technology of print preserved the distinctive liturgical traditions of Italian Jewry.

III. An Unorthodox Stance: Falling and Rising
The Rules of the Ring
Marquess of Queensberry Rules, Rule IV



“If either man fall, through weakness or otherwise, he must get up unassisted; ten seconds to be allowed him to do so.”

And when the fighter has risen:

“The round is to be resumed.”

The Rules of Teshuvah

Micah 7:8

כִּי נָפַלְתִּי קָמָתִי

“Though I have fallen, I rise.”

Explore the Collection

Jewish Boxing Trading Cards, New York, 1910

We will visit the JTS Library website to meet Joe Choynski, Charlie (Israel) Goldman, and Abe “Kid” Goodman—and consider what the discipline of the boxing ring might have to teach us about struggle, failure, resilience, and teshuvah (“repentance” or “return”).

IV. Returning

From U-Netaneh Tokef:

עַד יוֹם מוֹתוֹ תִּחַּכָּה לּוֹ
אִם יָשׁוּב מִיַּד תִּקְבְּלוּ

“Until the day of his death You wait for him;
if he returns, You accept him immediately.”