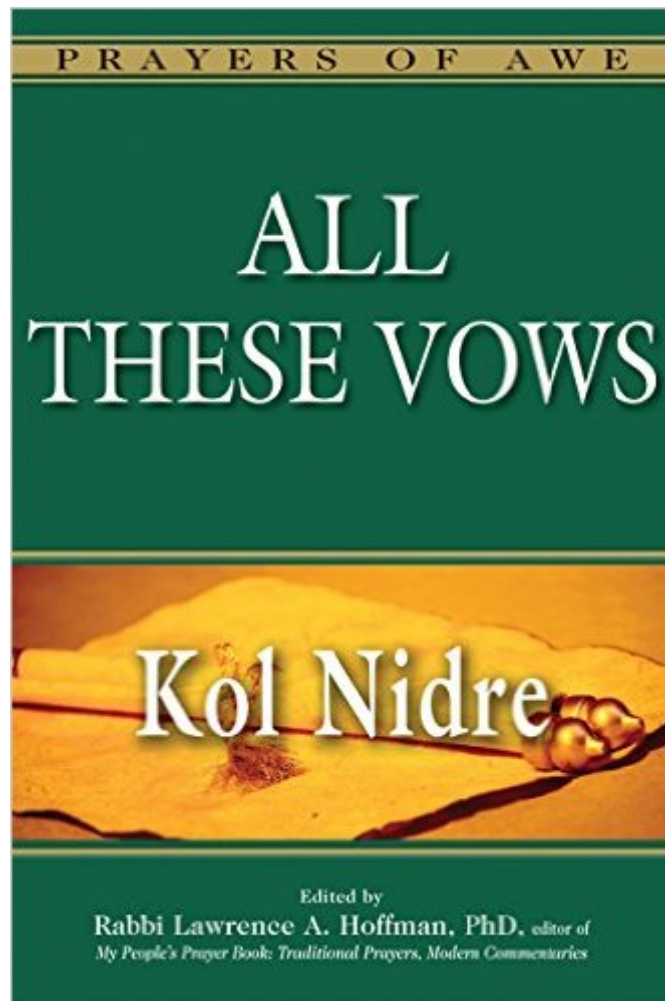


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# All These Vows: Kol Nidre (Prayers Of Awe)



## Synopsis

The most memorable prayer of the Jewish New Year—what it means, why we sing it, and the secret of its magical appeal. Through a series of lively commentaries, over thirty contributors—men and women, scholars and rabbis, artists and poets, spanning three continents and all major Jewish denominations—examine Kol Nidre's theology, usage, and deeply personal impact. They trace the actual history of the prayer and attempts through the ages to emend it, downplay it and even do away with it—all in vain. They explore why Kol Nidre remains an annual liturgical highlight that is regularly attended even by Jews who disbelieve everything the prayer says.

**Prayers of Awe** An exciting new series that examines the High Holy Day liturgy to enrich the praying experience of everyone—whether experienced worshipers or guests who encounter Jewish prayer for the very first time.

Contributors: Rabbi Tony Bayfield, CBE, DD & Dr. Annette M. Boeckler & Dr. Marc Zvi Brettler & Dr. Erica Brown & Dr. Eliezer Diamond & Rabbi Ruth Durchslag, PsyD & Rachel Farbiarz & Rabbi Edward Feinstein & Rabbi Shoshana Boyd Gelfand & Rabbi Andrew Goldstein, PhD & Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman, PhD & Rabbi Delphine Horvilleur & Rabbi Elie Kaunfer & Rabbi Karyn D. Kedar & Dr. Reuven Kimelman & Dr. Mark Kligman & Rabbi Lawrence Kushner & Rabbi Noa Kushner & Rabbi Daniel Landes & Liz Lerman & Catherine Madsen & Rabbi Jonathan Magonet, PhD & Rabbi Dalia Marx, PhD & Ruth Messinger & Rabbi Charles H. Middleburgh, PhD & Rabbi Rachel Nussbaum & Rabbi Aaron Panken, PhD & Rabbi Marc Saperstein, PhD & Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso & Rabbi Jonathan P. Slater, DMin & Rabbi David Stern & Rabbi David A. Teutsch, PhD & Dr. Ellen M. Umansky & Rabbi Margaret Moers Wenig, DD & Dr. Ron Wolfson & Rabbi Daniel G. Zemel & Dr. Wendy Zierler

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I had a hard time getting started on reading the book. But when I truly took the time to read the book, I found that it helped me to prepare myself mentally for the Kol Nidre service. It has good discussion of the history and the variations of the prayer among the various Jewish communities. It also gave me information that better prepared me for my rabbi's discussion of the prayer and the service in the days leading up to Yom Kippur.

I was looking for something more like R Hammer's book... This is not quite the ticket BUT I think a good 'also have' book for the synagogue or your personal library. Especially for those who want "a flavour of...." I prefer a more in depth look at practices and the liturgy with quotes to the sources.

Remarkably, very few people understand the content, purpose, and history of what many consider Judaism's most important prayer, a recitation embroiled in controversy, a legal document that the rabbis tried to expunge from the high holiday Day of Atonement service, Kol Nidre. This book discusses and explains Kol Nidre. What is Kol Nidre? Kol Nidre means "All these vows." It is not a prayer and is not addressed to God. It is a legal document, like one that lawyers today might draw up to protect a client from damages. It is composed very carefully in legal language, designed to annul vows by using the powers of a human court. Covering all bases, the recitation of Kol Nidre is effectuated by using the magical numbers seven and three. Kol Nidre, this book points out, "arose in the premodern world where superstition was still rampant." The earliest mention of Kol Nidre is in the mid-eighth century in Babylon where the rabbis were expressing their dislike of it. (Kol Nidre was not developed in the fourteenth century to allow Spanish Jews who were forced to promise to give up Judaism to nullify this vow, as many presume.) Since Judaism does not allow courts to adjudicate cases at night, Kol Nidre has to be recited before sundown. To highlight that it is still day, men put on the tallit before the service, for the tallit is worn during the day and not at night. Can Vows be annulled? The Bible offers no method to annul vows. Once a person makes a promise, the person must keep it, despite the consequences. This is seen in the story of Jephthah in Judges 11, where Jephthah foolishly promises to give to God "whatsoever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace" from war. He thought that an animal would greet him, but it was his daughter, his only child, that came to him and he had to give her to God. The only exception is

that the Torah allowed a father or husband to cancel a woman's vow on the day he became aware of it because the Bible considered the woman's vow only effective if her father or husband agreed with it. However, in post-biblical times, the rabbis allowed the nullification of vows, under certain conditions, by a Jewish court of three. This court of three could be composed of three laymen. Thus, Kol Nidre is recited before a minimum of three men standing on the bema, the podium. Most synagogues have at least two of the men hold scrolls of the Torah - the cantor, being busy singing, is unable to also hold the Torah - to enhance the solemnity of the Kol Nidre recitation. The use of three and seven

The ancients, non-Jews and Jews, thought that there is a mystical or magical quality to the numbers three and seven. Doing something three times makes the possibility of the request being effectuated more likely. Thus many Jews wash their hands three times in the morning to rid their bodies of demons that may have affected them during the night. Thus, too, Kol Nidre, its introductory few lines, and two prayers following Kol Nidre are recited three times. Seven is also seen to have powers, as when Joshua marched seven times around the city of Jericho to make it fall. Thus, the number seven is used in Kol Nidre. The use of three and seven also end the service of Yom Kippur when "Blessed is the name (meaning, existence) of His glorious kingdom for ever" is recited three times, and "The Lord is God" seven times.

What does Kol Nidre say? Legal documents attempt to cover every contingency. Therefore, Kol Nidre not only requests the three-man court to nullify vows, but any kind of promise made in any form. These include "prohibitions and oaths." In fact, Kol Nidre mention seven synonyms for vows, the last being a catchall "or any equivalent term," to end with seven. The recitation says that these should be "cancelled, nullified, powerless," using again a total of seven synonyms for annulment, including the catchall "we regret them all." Kol Nidre ends with a three-fold declaration, which may be seen as the petitioner's request or the courts decision: "The vows are not vows, the prohibitions not prohibitions, the oaths not oaths." Which oaths are we talking about, past or future ones?

The middle of the recitation is different in different synagogues and the original version was one of several reasons why the rabbis disliked Kol Nidre. Some people insist that it should states that we are talking about past vows, and this was the original version; others future vows, the language that was substituted in the twelfth century; and others both, a kind of compromise. There are legal, moral, social, philosophical and other problems with each version.

Kol Nidre Music Perhaps the main reason for the continued recitation of Kol Nidre today despite the rabbinical opposition and the reason why so many Jews enjoy the service is the stirring and beautiful music of Kol Nidre that haunts the congregant long after its chanting. It creates a deep religious feeling that moves the Jewish heart. The first written evidence of the melody is in 1765, although scholars think that it was probably composed in sixteenth-century

Germany. Summary Kol Nidre raises many problems. How can people rid themselves of promises? What happens to the person to whom the promise is made, who relied on the promise? Doesn't this nullification create a feeling of not caring what one promises because the oath can be cancelled? What did non-Jews think about this practice? These matters are discussed, along with many other subjects, in this book. Yet, despite its true meaning, problems, and opposition, Kol Nidre's generally obscure words and its moving music create a spiritual mystique and a ceremony with many messages. It is the only service that inspires virtually every Jew to arrive in the synagogue on time to hear it. It highlights the optimistic understanding that we can and should change past errors. It reminds congregants to do so. The absence of God in the recitation and the use of a human court emphasizes that people should work with each other to improve themselves and society. It emphasizes the importance of words and relationships. It teaches people not to make oaths. It stresses that we can pray with sinners. Furthermore, the request to annul future vows can be seen as a determination to refrain from repeating mistakes in the future.

Good, but not what I expected. Was looking more for traditional Festival interpretations. Good discussion on the origins of the festival.

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