

A Road Map for the Yom Kippur services

by Neil Parks

*"I've got those 'what-page-are-we-on-in-the-prayerbook' blues..."
--Popular Song*

Many people who can usually follow the synagogue services throughout most of year have some difficulty when it comes to Yom Kippur. If you are one of them, take heart: It isn't your fault. The problem is the arrangement of the Birnbaum Machzor.

In his introduction, Philip Birnbaum quotes a twelfth-century rabbi regarding the need to "copy every recurrent passage to the end." Birnbaum says that in his Machzor, "the worshipper is not called upon to search from page to page and to commute from reference to reference."

While that may have been Birnbaum's intention, the publisher did not always follow through on that worthy goal. In particular, there is one passage containing the Thirteen Attributes of Ha-Shem that is recited several more times than it appears in the Machzor. There are several possible reasons for this. One might be that, at over 1000 pages, the Machzor is heavy, and the publisher did not want to make it heavier than absolutely necessary. In his excellent book *Prayer and Penitence*, Rabbi Jeffrey Cohen says that there are varying traditions regarding the number of times the passage should actually be recited.

In order to follow the service correctly, we do need to commute among the references. A road map will help make the commuting easier. When you come to shul for the Kol Nidrei service, bring this page with you and take a few minutes before the service starts to see how it works.

At both the Maariv (Kol Nidrei) service which begins Yom Kippur, and the N'eela service which concludes it, parts of the service are arranged in the form of verses with a repeating chorus. In the Maariv, the chorus is recited four times, but is printed in full only twice. One appearance begins on page 527 and continues to page 529. The other is on page 539. Similarly, in the N'eela, the same chorus is recited seven times, but it appears in full only three times, on pages 987, 995, and 1001. All the other occurrences are incorporated only by reference.

The recurring chorus itself consists of two parts. The first part begins with the words: **אֵל מֶלֶךְ יוֹשֵׁב עַל כִּסֵּא רַחֲמִים** "Al-mighty king, who sits on the throne of mercy" and concludes with **וַיִּקְרָא בְשֵׁם ה'** "he proclaimed the name of the L-rd".

The second part begins **וַיַּעֲבֹר ה' עַל פָּנָיו** "The L-rd passed before him" and ends with **וְרַב חֶסֶד לְכָל קוֹרְאֶיךָ** "great kindness to all who call upon you".

Each time the chorus occurs, we recite the first part, and then wait for the Chazzan to repeat part of it. Then we do the same with the second part.

The references to the chorus occur in the Maariv on page 533 and 535. Look at page 533, near the top where it says "The ark is closed." Directly below that are the words **... אֵל מֶלֶךְ** in small letters. That is a reference indicating that the chorus should be inserted at that point. We turn to any of the pages where the chorus is printed in full, and recite the two parts. When we have finished, we return to the reference point and continue from there.

The other reference point in the Maariv is at the bottom of page 535. When we finish the poem on that page, we insert the chorus, and then return to the reference point to begin the poem on page 537.

In the N'eela, the procedure is exactly the same, except that it happens more often. There are two reference points on page 991--one after the second verse, and one after the fourth. There is a reference point following the fourth verse on page 993, and there is one more following the fourth verse on page 999.

And that's all there is to it.