

## Reclaiming That Which Is Ours!!

By Rabbi Laurence Rosenthal

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One of the blessings of being a Conservative Jew is the tension between tradition and change. As the world continues to develop, as spirituality continues to be explored, we are charged with holding on to our traditions while embracing modernity. Unfortunately, this change sometimes comes with loss. With the modern world being so strong and change being such an amazing force, tradition often finds itself barely holding on. And so we lose. We lose some of the traditions, habits and behaviors that once upon a time had the power to take an idea or a concept and make it corporeal, physical and real. This is most felt when observing the holiday of Yom Kippur. Because of the tone and tenor of the day, so much of what makes Jewish holidays festive and celebratory are missing. There is no meal, no Kiddush, no singing around our dinner table. Many great rabbis have focused on our abstaining from bodily pleasures as a means to elevate us closer to being angels who don't have such bodily needs. However, on Yom Kippur, we are dealing with some really heavy issues. Sin, regret, personal failings all swarm around us and are ever-present during this important day. Is there anything we can do to bring these concepts down to earth? Make them more manifest?

During the month of Elul, a few of us gathered together on Wednesday afternoons for our High Holiday Boot Camp. One of our topics of discussion was the ritual of Kaporot. Like Tashlich, where we imbue crumbs of bread with our sins and regret before casting them into Peachtree Battle Creek, Kaporot is also a purging ritual. Before the onset of Yom Kippur, after working through and making amends for our misgivings and mistakes throughout the *asaret yamay tshuva* – Ten days of Repentance – and with just a short time before we stand before God seeking forgiveness and repentance, we cast out our final transgressions.

If you haven't heard about this powerful ritual, don't worry, the vast majority of Jews don't know anything about it. It is a bit obscure. Even those who have heard about it probably haven't practiced it. If you Google Kaporot, you will quickly find out why. In the most traditional settings, a person will take hold of a live rooster or a hen, recite words of contrition and acknowledgment to God and then swing the bird over their head. After the ceremony is completed, the bird is ritually slaughtered and the carcass is donated as food to the poor in the community.

After learning about this interesting and at times disturbing ritual, our class decided to give it a try. DON'T WORRY!!! In the infinite wisdom of our Jewish tradition, there was a second option for fulfilling this special ritual. Instead of twirling a live bird over one's head, you can also use money which is placed in a bag which is then swung over the head. The funds are then given to charity.

So this year, with the encouragement of our students from the Wednesday High Holiday Boot Camp and a bit of support from you, we hope to reclaim a lost ritual from our tradition. On Kol Nidre evening, Tuesday, October 11<sup>th</sup>, come at 6:00 p.m. Drop your cans and bags of food off in the barrels for Operation Isaiah and then make your way to the Garden by the Cohen Pavilion. Bring a few coins or a few bills with you and join us as we do a final cleansing ritual before the onset of Yom Kippur. Will you feel pure at the end of it? Probably not. That's what the 25 hours of Yom Kippur is about. Will you feel a bit silly twirling a bag of money over your head? Probably yes. But that's OK. Reclaiming ritual is always a bit uncomfortable until we make it ours. I hope you will join us. All monies used for this fascinating experience will be donated to Operation Isaiah.

See you at 6 p.m. on October 11<sup>th</sup>

\*\*\*Disclaimer - No animals were hurt in the writing of this article.