

*Messorah and Royalty*  
A Yom Kippur Experience at K'hal Adath Jeshurun

I had the good fortune to *daven* at K'hal Adath Jeshurun (KAJ – ‘Breuer’s’) this past Yom Kippur (2013); since that time I have debated if I should put my experience in writing. An article in a local publication convinced me that sharing this experience may be worthwhile. Although when it comes to *minhagim* I personally follow Rav Binyomin Shlomo Hamburger of Machon Moreshes Ashkenaz (MMA- [www.moreshesashkenaz.org](http://www.moreshesashkenaz.org)), the differences between KAJ and MMA are minimal and generally nothing to be uptight over.

Being of German-Jewish descent and involved with MMA, I have wanted to attend KAJ for Yom Kippur for many years and when the opportunity arose I was about as excited for Yom Kippur as one can be.

As in a typical *schul*, the *paroches*, *shulchan* and *sifrei Torah* were covered in white. In addition to these characteristic features, the *inside* of the *aron* was also covered in white, as was the platform (*duchan*) in front of the *aron* and the steps leading up to the platform. Every *shtender* was covered with a white cloth that says *l'shana Tovah*. This sets the tone for a very royal configuration.

Supplementing this, most congregants (men, women and children) were dressed in white. For men, this minimally includes a white *yarmulke* (or *kaepchen* – a type of *yarmulke* that is larger than a contemporary *yarmulke* but smaller than the old Rabbinic *yarmulkes*) and tie. In addition, married men also wear a *kittel* (or *sargenes* – a type of *kittel* which is closed all around and is pulled over the head in the same manner as one would put on a T-Shirt) and a white-on-white *tallis*. Single men and boys wear their regular black striped *tallis*. Although the general rule in KAJ is that only the *Rabbanim* cover their heads with their *talleisim*, on *Yomim Noraim* this rule is relaxed. Some individuals cover their heads at various times while others do not. Hats are not worn in *schul* during these days.

Since KAJ follows the old Ashkenaz *messorah*, *tefillas Zakkah*, a prayer instituted by the “*Chayei Adam*” (Rabbi Avraham Danzig, 1748–1820) is not officially recited (although one can certainly come earlier and say it). The prayers of *Shema Koleinu* (until *Amareinu Ha'azinu*) and *Unesaneh Tokef* are similarly not recited. The *piyut* (liturgical poem) *Unesaneh Tokef* was instituted for Rosh Hashanah and was never accepted among German Jewry for Yom Kippur.

Before *Kol Nidrei*, the congregation did not don their *tallaisim* until the Rav and *Chazzan* recited the blessing on their *tallaisim* aloud; the congregation followed suit quietly. A similar procedure was followed before *Baruch Sheomar* in the morning.

The *piyutim* are generally recited according to the intention of the *paytan* and not according to the manner they are written in many *machzorim*. Portions set aside for the *chazzan* are recited aloud exclusively by him; those portions set aside for the congregation to respond with are said aloud exclusively by them. Many of the *piyutim* have their own melodies which sets the tone for the *chazzan* and *tzibur* for that particular piece.

Most melodies used in KAJ are, of course, of Western European origin, although many of the melodies are extremely old. It is possible that some are derivatives from the time of the second temple. In general, the tunes of German Jewry were composed to the words of a *piyut* as opposed to using a random popular song. At times, the congregation would sing along with the *chazzan*, although this was not the rule. In other *schuls*, when the *shliach tzibbur* reaches the end of a *piyut* or various parts of *Shemone Esrei*, the *tzibur* will briefly sing to fill in the pause. This does not exist in KAJ. Of course many of the tunes were foreign to me, as can be expected. Many of the *kaddashim* have their own special tunes. The *chazzanus* at KAJ is generally not operatic as some might imagine; these are skilled *ba'alei teffilah* who adhere faithfully to the *messorah* during *davening* and keep the *teffilah* moving along.

Just about every *piyut* in the *Machzor* was recited, which of course takes time. Additionally, select *selichos* were recited at every *teffilah*, including *Shacharis*, *Mussaf* and *Mincha*. The *selichos* to be recited are chosen in advance; seven *selichos* are recited during each of these three *teffilos*. It is astounding that so few Ashkenazic congregations recite *selichos* as is done in KAJ (and elsewhere) which until about 200 years ago was fairly standard in Europe and still is among non-Ashkenazim. The theme of Yom Kippur is *selicha* and *kapparah* and is the day when the 13 *Middos* were first proclaimed – it is a shame to go through the day only reciting *selichos* during *Maariv* and *Neilah*. Due to this grueling schedule, from the time *Shacharis* begins on Yom Tov morning through *Maariv* on *Motzaei Yom Tov*, there is no break. I thought I would have a lot of trouble adjusting to a *schul* with no downtime, and I therefore made sure to take my own breaks during the day. This, and the fact that the *Kehilla* adheres to the printed schedule, allowed me to focus on the *teffilah*.

The *Kohanim* went to the *duchan* three times; *Shacharis*, *Mussaf* and *Neilah*. Each time they sang a different tune relating to a different part of *teffilah*. The songs used by the *Kohanim* were different than anything I have ever heard and the tunes were obviously complicated. The singing was extensive even though Yom Kippur was on

Shabbos. The tunes and effect of the *birchas kohanim* was particularly majestic and beautiful.

Unlike other *schuls*, the *Kohanim* do not leave *schul* to wash their hands. Two carts are situated toward the front of the *schul*, each equipped with a silver pitcher and basin. The *Kohanim* line up to have their hands washed.

The *Shacharis laining* was read with the *Yomim Noraim* tune which is almost identical to the one that is used in most Ashkenaz *schuls*. This is in contrast to *Maftir* which was chanted according to the ancient standard *trop* as practiced by German Jewry.

The Torah, which during the year is wrapped in one *wimpel*, is wrapped with two *wimpels* on all *Yomim Tovim*. (A *wimpel* is a cloth used at a baby's *bris* which is later decorated and wrapped around the Torah instead of the modern *gartel*. It is then donated to the *schul*. *Chazal* refer to the *wimpel* as a *mitpachas*. The *mantel*, a later innovation, is placed over the *wimpel*. <Wimpel> or <wimple> is pronounced [vimpel] in IPA /vɪmpəl/. The first *wimpel* was wrapped facing outward so one looking can see some of the words written on it. The second *wimpel* does not have any words on it. In KAJ, the *wimpels* are wrapped from the top down rather than the more common custom of wrapping the *wimpel* from the bottom of the Torah to the top.

During *Mussaf*, *kor'im* was done in a different manner than I was used to. The *tzibbur* recited the paragraph of *V'hakohanim v'ha'am* to themselves and everybody bowed upon reaching the appropriate words. The *Chazzan* then sang the entire paragraph *after* the congregation had completed their recitation. Before he began, two individuals approached the *amud* and pushed it away. These individuals then rolled out a white carpet in front of the *Chazzan*. The *Chazzan* (E. Lasdun) did not bow like many are used to seeing but rather, to the obvious delight of many, he performed a variation of *pishut raglayim*, while keeping his hands at his sides. During this time, he continued to sing, which is no doubt a difficult feat. This author does not know why full *pishut yadayim v'raglayim* is not performed.

At the end of each *teffilah*, the congregation called out, unanimously and in a loud voice, "Yasher Koach!"

At the end of *Nelilah*, the *shaimos* were recited differently than most congregations. The Rav recited *HaShem hu haElokim*, followed by the congregation. The Rav recited it the first time, followed by the congregation. This responsive recitation continued until the Rav and *tzibur* each recited the phrase seven times. *Shema Yisroel* was recited out loud one time by the Rav, followed by the congregation, and *baruch shaim* was said

quietly. This was immediately followed by *shofar* (one *tekiah*) and *v'hu rachum* for *Maariv*.

The choir in KAJ does not participate in the actual *teffilah* – ever, with the exception of *Hallel*. On Yom Kippur, the choir only sings after *Maariv* (*Yigdal* and *Adon olam*), and when the Torah is taken out and put away at *Shacharis* and *Mincha*. The choir adds to the majestic atmosphere of the *davening* and probably did not extend the service by more than a couple of minutes.

Even though it was Yom Kippur, people were friendly and welcoming.

Overall, the entire experience at KAJ had a different feel to it than your standard *schul* or *yeshiva*. In *yeshiva*, for example, the *davening* clearly centers around the idea of *viduy*. In KAJ, to this author at least, the *davening* reflected a certain kingliness, *malchus*, that is imbued with the ancient *messorah* of Ashkenaz. This was an experience that I hope to be able to participate in again.

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