


על חטא שחטאנו לפניך בפריקת עול
For the sin we have sinned before
You in throwing off [Your] yoke

ANGELA HIMSEL


“Casting off the yoke” connotes a mental image of an ox freeing himself from the wooden device that tethers him to the other ox with whom he pulls the plow. His freedom, however, will impose an impossible burden for his partner to bear alone, and will result in an untilled earth, incapable of vegetation. Casting off the yoke of the commandments means not only that our Partner will be forced to perfect this world alone, without our help, but also that we will cease to be connected to our Partner in the same way that we once were while walking and working together under the yoke of the Law. 

Angela Himself has been widely published and her bi-weekly column “Angetevka” appears on www.zeek.forward.com and the *Huffington Post*.

על חטא שחטאנו לפניך בתשומת יד
For the sin that we have sinned
before You in the matter of
extending a hand

RICHARD MARKER

The traditional understanding refers to breaking a financial promise, a violation of fiduciary commitment. Given the breakdown of world economies over the last couple of years, mostly brought about by abuse of the public trust, little more need be said about why this *al chet* is included.

But this *al chet*, at the very end of our list, implies that we need to repent for any breach of trust, the precondition on which all civil society depends. Without trust, there is no hope — and thus only the loneliness of our private angst. Its breach is a sin that impacts all. 

Rabbi Richard Marker, who teaches philanthropy at New York University, advises philanthropists and foundations.




על חטא שחטאנו לפניך בלי דעת
For the sin we have sinned
before You without knowing

MOSHE WALDOKS

I struggle with the lack of impulse control. This can be a plus and a minus. As a comedian, it has been helpful. Comic interjection feeds on the power of not overcoming impulse — of being able to offer a riposte almost instinctively, and of not waiting for any inner censorship or extensive rumination. Rumination may be good for philosophers; for comics, it is death.

But generally, it is a weakness that causes needless suffering for me and for those with whom I’m close. “Acting without thinking” can result in thoughtless and dangerous behavior. It also makes me a bit gullible to cold calls from investment companies.

Certain spiritual practices help curb a lack of impulse control: living more intentionally, practicing meditation, slowing down (if that’s really possible for a pulpit rabbi), and increasing self-awareness.

In some cases, an immediate, impulsive response can be quite successful; in other instances, it leads to misjudgment. 

Moshe Waldoks is the co-editor of *The Big Book of Jewish Humor*, and rabbi of Temple Beth Zion, an independent synagogue in Brookline, Mass.

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throwing off [Your] yoke

YOSEFA FOGEL

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik teaches that in the same way in which disease is often foreshadowed by physical pain, sin is often accompanied by a personal sense of discomfort in one’s own skin — by a deep-seated feeling of wrongdoing.

But as I throw my right fist against my upper left chest, I suddenly recall the moments when sin felt wonderful — when removing God’s burden afforded me a respite from the limitations of *halakhah* and exalted personal expectation.

I hit my chest a bit harder. I shouldn’t be standing here nostalgically thinking about the choices I do not always regret. 

Yosefa Fogel, a recent graduate of Yeshiva University’s Stern College for Women, lives in Israel and is pursuing a master’s degree in Tanach at Bar-Ilan University.