

The Day of Atonement

by [Jeffrey Burghauer](#) (April 2025)



Self Portrait with a Horn (Max Beckmann, 1938)

It is a widespread custom in most of the Diaspora of Israel to recall the souls of one's fathers and relatives who went to their eternal world, on Yom Kippur after the reading from the Prophets, and to donate to charity for the recollection of their souls. [...] Whether he be young or old, everyone whose father and mother are still alive goes outside during the Memorial Prayers, to avoid the

possibility of the evil eye[.] –S.Y. Agnon[*]

Tenor

May God remember all the souls
Of those whose names comprise the rolls
 Of the slain—
By means of bullet, fire, spear,
Or truncheon, turned into a mere
 Thickened stain.

May God remember all the men
Reduced into a slurry when
 Lethal glee
Inspired incoherent brutes
Of Spain, Majdanek & Kibbutz
 Be'eri.

Without descending to allow
Myself an irreligious vow
 (Vows imply
A power over forces kept
Obscure to everyone except
 Adonai),

I vow before the Heavens' King
To give a sweetly whispering,
 Modest sum
In grateful memory of those
Upon whom Destiny bestows
 Martyrdom.

And may their souls receive from Thee
The everlasting unity
 Justice marks

For those who die in Heaven's bright
Esteem, and all the Israelite
Patriarchs.

Echo

*But what if Martyrdom had found
The panting Jew on Christian ground,
Having run,
Indignant, after seeing a
Repulsive curse in being a
Father's son?*

[*] *Days of Awe: A Treasury of Jewish Wisdom for Reflection, Repentance, and Renewal on the High Holy Days.* Schocken Books Inc., 1965. p. 235.

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