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### October 9, 2019: Yom Kippur and the Shootings

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Title: Yom Kippur and the Shootings

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10/9/2019—The Jewish community in Pittsburgh continues to struggle to come to terms with the shootings a little more than a year ago that killed 11 persons and wounded others at a synagogue building housing three congregations. Because of the timing, the shootings have been on the minds of many during this High Holy Day season.

Actually, all of Pittsburgh is reminded of these events. That is obviously true of me, but I retain many ties to Judaism, including an awareness of the liturgical calendar.

Commemorations climax today, on the holiest day of the year—Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

On this day of fasting, Jews seek forgiveness of sins, both individually and collectively.

The Christian question after such a horrific act tends to be one of forgiveness of the perpetrator. This echoes Jesus's call from the cross—Father forgive them for they know not what they do.

This is a theme that Dan Leger, who was badly wounded in the shootings, referred to in a story in the Jewish Chronicle. Dan, whom I have known for years, and who is a spiritual source for many at Dor Hadash and in the community generally, said that when he awoke after the shooting, the first thing he said was the Shema, the second was "I love you" to his family. The third thing was, "God forgive him," very much like Jesus.

I am not aware that this fits exactly with the meaning of Yom Kippur, however. On the cross, Jesus is not concerned with his own sin and the point of Christian theology is that he was blameless—without sin.

Yom Kippur, on the other hand, is about one's own sin. Obviously, there is no direct relationship to a terrible Anti-Semitic act of violence, for which the victims bear no blame.

On the other hand, Rabbi Friedman, an Orthodox rabbi in the Chasidic tradition, tells a story from the Baal Shem Tov, the founder, who told of a man who kept two ledgers—one of his sins and the other of God's sins. He tossed both in the fire, saying, "if you forgive mine, I will forgive yours." We could think of the shooting as an offense by God.

Then there is the communal theme. On Yom Kippur in the Torah, the sins considered are more national than personal. The sins of the Jewish people. After the Holocaust, this led Jewish thinkers like Emil Fackenheim to radically rethink the relationship of the Jewish people to God.

Here is what Fackenheim said: "we are, first, commanded to survive as Jews, lest the Jewish people perish. We are commanded, secondly, to remember in our very guts and bones the martyrs of the Holocaust, lest their memory perish. We are forbidden, thirdly, to deny or despair of God, however much we may have to contend with him or with belief in him, lest Judaism perish. We are forbidden, finally, to despair of the world as the place which is to become the kingdom of God, lest we help make it a meaningless place in which God is dead or irrelevant

and everything is permitted. To abandon any of these imperatives, in response to Hitler's victory at Auschwitz, , would be to hand him yet other, posthumous victories.”

Fackenheim should be remembered today, but I actually cannot remember anyone talking about him. Of course, I have not been attending these remembrances, so maybe I just missed it. Fackenheim was not enough to keep me within Judaism. But I have been living with the world as a meaningless place, just as he feared.