

Life Through Denial: A Comparison of the Holy Seasons
of Jewish Teshuvah and Yom Kippur, Christian Lent, and Islāmic Ramadan

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Wesleyans celebrate God's prevenient grace at work throughout world, including other faiths. This paper explores some of the core theological themes, practices, and imaginations regarding the performance of fasting and repentance during specific seasons in the worship calendar of three monotheistic religions: *Teshuvah* and *Yom Kippur* in the Jewish tradition, the Christian season of Lent, and the Islāmic season of Ramadan. Such a conversation has a two-fold aim: first, as Christians familiar with Lent, attending to the cultic practices and liturgical imagination of Jewish and Islāmic worship may offer prophetic illumination and enrichment to the Christian celebration of Lent. Second, as neophyte student of both the Jewish and Islāmic faiths, such a juxtaposition may provide opportunities for new conversations and relationships with Jews and Muslims based on the possibility of shared emphases of the formational liturgies and practices of self-denial and concern for the other so prominent in all three monotheistic religions. Specific focus will be given to the practices of fasting, repentance and transformation. Since Lent is more common to this group, greater attention will be spent on Jewish and Islāmic worship. At the outset, this paper is also cautious about any type of comparisons that are implicitly or explicitly construed as violently colonial. As places of possible connection are considered, they should be understood as anecdotal, rather than making dogmatic claims portending to define specifically what IS Jewish, Muslim, and even Christian worship.

Jewish Worship: Teshuvah and Yom Kippur

This engagement with Jewish worship first explores the power and hope celebrated in the invitation to life through the process of *Teshuvah*. In light of such practices and imaginations, the paper then considers *Yom Kippur* as one of the High Holy Days as a Day of Atonement. Several important themes will be woven throughout this journey into Jewish worship. First, such practices seek transformation from sin into life as a reconnection with the Holy One. Second, fasting and denial (cutting off) are practices that help facilitate ongoing transformation. Third, such practices aim at a renewal of persons into the image of God. This is a renewal of persons with God and others, both Jew and gentile. Finally, such repentance and transformation do not hope to end with the person, but with the full redemption of the entire world, anticipating the World-to-Come.

Teshuvah

At the heart of *teshuvah* is the invitation to return (*shivah*)- returning not only to one's past (ancestors), "but to the Divine source of all being: 'You shall return (*shavta*) to the Lord your God.'"¹ While *teshuvah* plays a central role in Judaism, there is not a monolithic motivation or mode of *teshuvah*. *Teshuvah* is more than repentance from sin; "it is spiritual awakening, a desire to strengthen the connection between oneself and the sacred."² Orthodox Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz suggests that a way to measure the effectiveness of *teshuvah* is connected to one's distance from the sacred. In other words the greater ones distance from the sacred the greater

¹ Adin Steinsaltz, *Teshuvah: A Guide for the Newly Observant Jew*. Ed. And trans by Michael Swirsky (Jerusalem: Maggid Books, 1987), 3.

² Steinsaltz, 3.

potential for renewed connectedness. This is not an implicit encouragement to create distance only to transgress it; rather the emphasis is not perfunctory actions, but relational reunion. Within the contextual diversity a common center of *teshuvah* is “the belief that human beings have it in their power to effect inward change.”³ What is intriguing is the degree to which a human being in need of return can return on her own power, rather than relying on the Divine’s power for return. This is striking when compared too much of the Christian tradition, which asserts that the power of sin leaves persons inept to return on their own power and merit and resist sin.⁴ Steinsaltz is not ignorant of the proclivity towards transgressions leading to other transgressions and is quick to recognize the addictive nature and power of transgressions. However, Steinsaltz suggests that within the magnetic pull of transgressions creating relational (and perhaps physical) distance, through the habituation of *teshuvah* a possibility to turn back remains. The emphasis appears to be one of hope; no matter how far away and for how long one is from the Divine, returning back is always an option. *Teshuvah* is the “ever-present possibility of changing one’s life and the very direction of one’s life.”⁵ Change and return is always possible.

Process of *Teshuvah*

Steinsaltz highlights two essentials in *teshuvah*: “the renunciation of the regretted past and the adoption of a better path to be followed henceforth. Put concretely, *teshuvah* is simply a turning, be it a complete, abrupt change of direction or a series of smaller turn, not all of equal significance.”⁶ This feels similar to the Christian grammar of both confession of sin and the seeking of repentance. In the Orthodox Jewish tradition this turn is abrupt and comprehensive, while not a total rejection of a person, many things are started from scratch.⁷ This cutting off from the past may cause a rupture with current biological family who are presently not practicing according to Steinsaltz.⁸ Yet what motivates or illuminates this need to turn? Steinsaltz suggest that persons are motivated by *Teshuvah* because of an intense recognition of their sinfulness, and thus distance from God. Such awareness then provides an intense desire to escape the defilement and seek purification.⁹

The second aspect of *Teshuvah* is referred to as *kabbalah le’atid*- resolve. This second phase is connected to this first and is dependent on the strength and clarity of the awareness of the past. Such a remembering of the past moves beyond despair (without hope) and despondency (without care) such as to ignore maladies and moves persons to confidence that change is possible. At the heart of *teshuvah* is the belief that one can and must change. “Knowing that the door is always open and that there is a way through it, knowing that there is no irredeemable situation, can itself serve as a goad to *teshuvah*.”¹⁰

A rejection of the past and a resolve to seek a new life reconnected to God is the central hope of *teshuvah*. “*Teshuvah*, then, is a universe unto itself, encompassing two apparent opposites: It is, on the one hand, an exceedingly lengthy path with no clear end. Whatever one’s starting point, each subsequent moment of change throughout life becomes part of the unfolding of that initial inner resolve to make the turn.”¹¹ The first phase is one of destruction, while the second is one of reconstruction. This reconstruction is not a “creation of a new being” but a proper fulfillment of one’s being. On the other hand, *teshuvah* can be seen as a flash of regret

³ Steinsaltz, 3.

⁴ It appears what Steinsaltz is describing would be labeled by the Christian tradition as pelagianism, yet a more careful attention is needed before offering a label.

⁵ Steinsaltz, 4

⁶ Steinsaltz, 4

⁷ Steinsaltz, 61.

⁸ Steinsaltz, 61-62.

⁹ Steinsaltz, 5

¹⁰ Steinsaltz, 6.

¹¹ Steinsaltz, 7.

and resolution, a sudden insight that change and improvement are needed.”¹² Steinsaltz notes that these two aspects are complementary. Complete self-transformation takes a lifetime, yet the early resolve to begin offers hope for the journey. The transitions and transformations of each person offer moments of risk and uncertainty, which promises change, but is grounded by faith.

Priority of Actions Over Intent

Within this transformation leaving the past and resolving to return to God, Steinsaltz offers an intriguing picture into the theory of ritual formation, intent is not necessary for obedience of the *mitzvot*. “From a *halakhic* [Jewish law] point of view, the act alone is generally sufficient (‘mitzvot do not require intent’).”¹³ This is not suggesting intentions are irrelevant, but when absent the action still can transform. When someone does not feel like fasting, one should still fast despite one’s present disposition. However, a fuller power of transformation occurs when combined with proper intention. While “intentions alone accomplish nothing; they only become significant in relation to the actions they lead to...by the same token, a misdeed committed with the best of intentions remains a misdeed.”¹⁴ Hence, there is a complex relationship between actions and intentions. It appears that one’s continual obedience to *mitzvot* can help transform and mature one’s intentions, so that through repetition of obedient action one begins to more and more desire not simply the action of obedience, but the world that such obedience invites and makes. *Kavannah* (intention) provides subjective meaning to the *mitzvah* in the mind of the doer at the moment the act is executed. Yet a lack of enthusiasm should not be a deterrent. One’s actions and obedience are not “necessarily based on enthusiasm or even wholehearted assent. Often ‘we shall do’ must precede ‘we shall hear’; though ‘not yet ready’, one must sometimes undertake to do the thing nevertheless.”¹⁵ In this way the actions themselves can help to shape the desire, will, and imagination.¹⁶

Aidan Kepnes agrees with Steinsaltz in the power and import of the performative action, either in communal worship or private *mitzvot* (commandment). While the intention is not irrelevant, it is the act itself that has a kind of priority over simply thoughts about the actions. The meaning and power of liturgy and *mitzvot* as an artistic encounter and performance has the meaning and power of the action lying properly in the enactment and viewing.¹⁷ Drawing upon the pioneering work of Arnold Van Gennep, Kepnes notes that in rituals persons travel on a path from separation, through transition into incorporation.¹⁸ The practices transform persons and communities. Moreover Kepnes also draws upon the work of Victor Turner who explores the power of liminality in the ritual as a process of transformation. Kepnes notes that in the experience of redemption in the Passover Seder or “eternity” in the Shabbat liturgy, persons experience temporary transformation, as full redemption is still yet to come.¹⁹ The action has power, even power to transform the will and desires of the actor.

Yom Kippur

Yom Kippur is the Day of Atonement, defined by love and forgiveness. Yom Kippur is one of the High Holy Days in the Jewish calendar, celebrated on the 10th day of *Tishrei*. This day commemorates the narrative of

¹² Steinsaltz, 7

¹³ Steinsaltz, 27.

¹⁴ Steinsaltz, 28.

¹⁵ Steinsaltz, 39.

¹⁶ This seems congruent with James K. A. Smith’s work *Desiring the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009), where one’s imagination and desires are shaped through doing (liturgies of life) rather than thinking.

¹⁷ Steven Kepnes, *Jewish Liturgical Reasoning* (Oxford University Press, 2007), 18.

¹⁸ Arnold van Gennep, *Les Rites de passage* (Paris: E. Nourry, 1909), 91

¹⁹ Kepnes, *Jewish Liturgical Reasoning*, 19.

Moses who came down from Sinai with the second set of the tablets of the Ten Commandments, to replace the original set broken upon witnessing the children of Israel worshipping the Golden Calf. As part of this remembrance persons are discouraged from wearing any gold or jewelry so as to remind God of their sin in forging the golden calf (Exodus 32-34). During the Temple period (*yovel*) rituals and sacrifices were central to Yom Kippur (Leviticus 16). These sacrifices included the scapegoat ceremony. One goat would be offered as a sacrifice in the Holy of Holies, while the second would be released into the wilderness. After the destruction of the Temple, repentance remained central to Yom Kippur, with a renewed emphasis on prayer and fasting.

Fasting in Yom Kippur

Yom Kippur is a celebration basking in the Light of the World-to-Come, where God satisfies and satiates all needs. Hence, fasting is a central practice of this celebration to foster a reunion in God. David Aaron notes that the celebration of fasting names that God alone satisfies; hence, this “is the deeper reason that we don’t eat on this day.”²⁰ Moreover, all other attention for the body to abstain emphasizes the connection to God as the source of all needs. Reformed Jew, Lawrence Hoffman agrees that such fasting aims at repentance and reunion with God. According to Hoffman, Yom Kippur became known biblically as the day one should afflict oneself, thus atoning for sin as the fast *par excellence* of Judaism.²¹ As an embodiment of repentance, the Talmud requires that self-denial is practiced to facilitate one’s reconciliation. “And this shall be to you a law for all time: In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall practice self-denial (Leviticus 16.29; cf Leviticus 23.27, Numbers 29.7).”²²

The requirement to “practice self-denial” is interpreted in the Talmud to mean the following five prohibitions: eating, drinking, bathing, sexual relations, using bath oils and lotions, etc., and wearing leather shoes.²³ The fast for not wearing leather shoes is not about comfort, but as made from animal hides representing the body. “Not wearing leather shoes on Yom Kippur is an external act that reflects an internal state of being. On Yom Kippur we disassociate ourselves, for one day, from our bodies so that they do not separate us from immersing ourselves in the *mikvah* of God’s oneness. We say: ‘I am one in Him, and I am loved by Him with the very love that He loves Himself, because I am an aspect of His very self.’”²⁴ Moreover, to emphasize this unity in God, “on Yom Kippur we celebrate forgiveness, because we realize that only love is real—everything else is illusion.”²⁵ Hence, one’s denial is a recognition of the futility of sin and a desire to communion with real love in God.

The Torah links Yom Kippur with the practice of self-denial on three occasions. Chaim Stern notes that this threefold command offers several reasons for fasting.

Judaism calls for self-discipline. When we control our appetites on Yom Kippur, we remember that on other days, too, we can be masters, not slaves, of our desires. Judaism calls for empathy. When we consciously experience hunger, we are more likely to consider the millions who need no Yom Kippur in order to suffer hunger. For some, most days are days without food enough for themselves and their children.²⁶ Judaism calls for penitence. The confession we make with our lips is a beginning. The

²⁰ David Aaron, *Inviting God In: Celebrating the Soul-Meaning of the Holy Days* (Boston and London: Trumpeter, 2006), 117.

²¹ Lawrence A. Hoffman, *Gates of Understanding 2: Appreciating the Days of Awe* (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1984), 109.

²² *Gates of Repentance: The New Union Prayer Book for the Days of Awe* (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1996), 229.

²³ Drawn from the internet <http://www.hillel.org/jewish/holidays/yomkippur/default on July 2>, 2013.

²⁴ Aaron, 118.

²⁵ Aaron, 120.

²⁶ This is a central aspect of fasting for both Christians and Muslims.

penance we inflict upon our bodies through fasting, leads us along further still toward the acknowledgment that we have sinned against ourselves and others.²⁷

Stern follows this up by suggesting that such fasts are only fruitful and good if they move persons toward transformation “of self and society whose achievement is the ultimate end of our worship on Yom Kippur.”²⁸ This hope and imagination of Yom Kippur is important to hold as a primary lens. While individuals play an important role, the full hope is not simply individual moral excellence, but the transformation of all creation. Moreover, Yom Kippur seeks to transform all persons and deeds from darkness to light. As noted above this imagination is a transformation of the World

Excursus: Jewish Rabbinic Time

Rabbinic time is not measured through an endless addition of chronological years with infinite successive numbering, but by eons, “of which there are only three.”²⁹ The first eon corresponds to the Temple, connected to the Jew’s ability to fulfill the covenant in fullness. While this first eon does not have one shared term, Maimonides, however, described it as the Sabbatical Year (*shemitah*), and the Jubilee Year (*the yovel*); from thence, it became common to call it *Yovel*, or in English, Time-Past.

The second epoch is *Zeman Hazeh* or Time-Now. The third epoch is known as *Olam Haba* or *Yemot Hamashiach*, in English Time-to-Come. Time-to-Come would arise at the end of Time-Now, which was “likened to the Garden of Eden all over again, the triumph of justice and right, or messianically induced reestablishment of the Temple and its cult among other things.”³⁰ Curiously, Hoffman notes that there is little consensus on the exact nature of Time-to-Come, “except of course, that it would indeed come. In the meantime one was to settle down to fulfill the commandments relevant to Time-Now and thereby hasten the day of that coming.”³¹ It is noteworthy that one’s living into the commandments offers a vision and goal beyond one’s own piety, but one’s living into the commandments would participate and bring more fully the Time-to-Come. One’s *teshuvah* participates in an ushering of the Time-to-Come. “Judaism’s purpose is not to nullify or shun the world we live in, but to heal and perfect it.”³² Judaism is not a rejection but celebration of what the world will become.

Yom Kippur is a day of transformation “when our darkest deeds from the past turn into light. This is because the light of the World-to-Come, so to speak, is shining into our world on this day.”³³ As part of the Yom Kippur celebration in the Evening Service after the Scrolls are returned to the Ark, this prayer is offered as part of the *Shema and its Blessing*.

When justice burns within us like a flaming fire, when love evokes willing sacrifice from us, when, to the last full measure of selfless devotion, we demonstrate our belief in the ultimate triumph of truth and righteousness, then Your goodness enters our lives; then you live within our hearts and we through righteousness behold Your presence.³⁴

The encounter with God not only calls for confession and transformation of persons but also living into God’s full redemption of creation. As such, rabbinic literature does not spend much time on irrelevant details of

²⁷ Chaim Stern, *Gates of Repentance: The New Union Prayer Book for the Days of Awe*, 229.

²⁸ Chaim Stern, *Gates of Repentance: The New Union Prayer Book for the Days of Awe*, 229.

²⁹ Lawrence A. Hoffman, *Beyond the Text: A Holistic Approach to Liturgy*, reprint ed.(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 82.

³⁰ Hoffman, *Beyond the Text*, 83.

³¹ Hoffman, *Beyond the Text*, 83.

³² Steinsaltz, 59.

³³ Aaron, 104.

³⁴ Gates of Repentance, 255.

historical events. Hoffman notes the frustration among historians that so little day to day records have been left. Conversely, going beyond a fixation on the present, the rabbis “fixed their gaze on Time-to-Come.”³⁵ As such in worship both Torah and *Haftarah* readings are read according to mythological rather than chronological principles.

Teshuvah and Yom Kippur: Transformation of Self for God, Other, and World

The imagination of *teshuvah* specifically celebrated and practiced in Yom Kippur seeks reconciliation with God, self, others (both Jew and Gentile) and participates in the further transformation of the Time-Now into the Time-to-Come. Kepnes draws upon the work of Hermann Cohen’s *Religion of Reason: Out of the Sources of Judaism*, published in Germany in 1919, to illustrate this fullness of hope.³⁶ Cohen suggests that liturgy is the bridge “between the self and community, the self and God, and the self and its growth into moral autonomy.”³⁷ Kepnes claims that Cohen’s success is explaining how “the individual becomes at once autonomous and moral, at once for others, for itself, and for its community. This could be described as becoming responsible for the redemption of the world.”³⁸ This links to both Steinsaltz and Lawrence Hoffman, noting how one’s being as liturgical is at once a becoming of persons in community as well as participating in the redemption of all creation. While the individual demands of Judaism are not ignored, the imagination moves beyond a personal piety, to a restoration and redemption of the cosmos.³⁹

Reconciled to God

At the heart of Yom Kippur and *teshuvah* is reconciliation with God. One of the gifts of *kavannah* (intentions) that comes with habituation to the *mitzvot* leads to a greater awareness of God. It is the basic *kavannah*

that one is about to perform a *mitzvah*, to fulfill the will of the Creator. Such *kavannah* arises from the recognition that the *mitzvah* is a vehicle for the relationship between human beings and the Divine. The heartfelt desire for transcendence, for some kind of contact with the Holy One, blessed be He, is the inner expression of the human soul, the very essence of humanness. This aspiration, which grows ever stronger as one’s inner stature grows, can never be fully realized, for with spiritual growth and the deepening of knowledge comes every-clearer recognition of the unbridgeable chasm between oneself and the infinite... The *mitzvah*, then, is essentially just a line connecting heaven and earth, a sort of epistle from on high, a finger extended in order to be grasped. Its decisive importance lies not in its content or efficacy, be it material or spiritual, but in the fact that it constitutes a point of contact with Divine.⁴⁰

This is central for the Jewish imagination. The primary hope of one’s *teshuvah* is not a quest for moralism, it seeks a greater connection to God, which also participates in the further coming of the World-to-Come. “Herein lies the general intent or *kavannah* of all the *mitzvot* : the love and fear of God.”⁴¹ David Aaron notes that within this vision of the World-to-Come is also the affirmation that God alone is the ruling power and God. “We do not exist apart from God; rather we exist within Him” (perhaps connections to Christian theosis).⁴² Aaron notes

³⁵ Hoffman, *Beyond the Test*, 83.

³⁶ Hermann Cohen, *Religion der Vernuft: Aus den Quellen des Judentum*, 1st ed. (Leipzig: Fock, 1919).

³⁷ Kepnes, *Jewish Liturgical Reasoning*, 45.

³⁸ Kepnes, *Jewish Liturgical Reasoning*, 45.

³⁹ In delineating his work, Kepnes suggests that beyond the labels of Cohen as a “proto-existentialist” he is a liturgical and textual (Jewish Scriptures) reasoner.

⁴⁰ Steinsaltz, 29.

⁴¹ Steinsaltz, 29.

⁴² Aaron, 105.

that Yom Kippur is a *mikvah* in time. A *mikvah* is a purifying ritual bath where the oneness of God is experienced. “When you enter a *mikvah* you are immersing yourself back into God’s all-compassing oneness, simulating the experience of existing within God.”⁴³ Purity is about closeness and intimacy with God. While Rosh Hashanah celebrates God’s transcendence, in Yom Kippur God’s healing and transforming imminence is encountered.

Rosenzweig also notes the use of white robes in Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur signify “suffering and death as a process of atonement.”⁴⁴ At Yom Kippur the penitent confronts God alone as Judge and is judged. The shroud of death heightens the intimacy of judgment, which erases distance between time and eternity. Yet Kepnes notes that the ultimate power of the Yom Kippur liturgy is that “judgment turns to mercy, and the liturgy communicates that God is, above all else, merciful.”⁴⁵ Hence, the retelling of God’s mercy in Exodus 34:6-8, celebrating God’s *hesed* and desire to forgive, pardon, and transform. Moreover, Yom Kippur is also the only day a tallit (a four cornered prayer shawl with fringes symbolizing the 613 commandments) is worn in the evening, celebrating the life giving of the *mitzvot*.

As another example of this transformation during the afternoon service of Yom Kippur, the story of Jonah and the whale is read. Jonah is pleading for the Ninevites to atone for their sins or face divine punishment. The Ninevites are representative of humanity at large who have sinned and must repent, the first lesson. God forgives them (lesson two), but Jonah is also representative of humanity. He flees God’s scrutiny (a relearning of lesson one where persons seek to escape judgment for sincere atonement). Yet God understands the weakness of Jonah and patiently explains this weakness and offers forgiveness (lesson two).⁴⁶ The emphasis of sin followed by atonement or punishment is seen with the readings on the Sabbaths before and after Yom Kippur, the former named *Shabbat Shubah*, the Sabbath of Repentance.

Human Responsibility in Communal Worship

Within the habituation of *teshuvah* and Yom Kippur, through attention and obedience to *mitzvot* the emphasis is not that God causes the sanctification, but that it happens before God, in order to emphasize the role and responsibility of the human will. God is the moral archetype and thus the life of sacrifice seeks the goal to be remade into the *imitatio deo*. With this as the goal the task becomes infinite. “The infinite nature of the task of ethical self-transformation means that God stands at the end of the process as opposed to at the beginning of the process as the cause of the process.”⁴⁷ Cohen suggests the “God’s entire relation to man [sic] is assigned to the domain of teleology, which is different from all causality.”⁴⁸ While communion to God is the end, the importance of the individual actor is central in this process of sanctification.

While each person has a “responsibility” of her sin, the Day of Atonement celebrates that the work of transformation cannot be accomplished by the individual alone. “The congregation, the priest, the liturgy of atonement, and God are all necessary to achieve the process of moral self-creation.”⁴⁹ What is clear is the need for the public practices of *t’shuva*.

This constantly new beginning must be joined to public institution; it cannot be actualized merely in the silence and secrecy of the human heart. It is the meaning of all institutions that they support the

⁴³ Aaron, 115.

⁴⁴ Kepnes, 116.

⁴⁵ Kepnes, 116.

⁴⁶ Hoffman, *Beyond the Test*, 85.

⁴⁷ Kepnes, 72.

⁴⁸ Cohen, 214.

⁴⁹ Kepnes, 69.

individual is his moral work...A similar actuality is to be demanded from confession and to be sought in a public institution. This desire is satisfied by divine worship.⁵⁰

Cohen suggests that in the transformation of Israelite sacrifice into the Yom Kippur liturgy there is a “self-sanctification” of the individual I which the “autonomy of the will must remain inviolably in power.”⁵¹ The priest’s purification becomes a symbolic enactment of the purification and atonement that must occur in the life of the individual. “Penitence leads to atonement and forgiveness; the essence of forgiveness is the wiping away of sin, a kind of rebirth of the sinner...atonement itself is a renewal in which past transgressions are made null and void and virtually cease to exist.”⁵² Kepnes suggests that Cohen’s steps for transformation align well with Maimonides’s steps of repentance from his *Hilhot Teshuva*, his “Laws of Repentance.”⁵³ Cohen asserts that “Repentance is self-sanctification. Everything that can be meant by remorse, turning to the depths of the self and examining the entire way of life of all that is brought together in self-sanctification. It contains the power and the direction in which repentance must employ itself for the new creation of the true I.”⁵⁴ Each person is called to participate in their self-sanctification. As such the sanctification does not end simply with one’s reconciliation with God.

Reconciled In and to Community

Moreover, the congregation is also vital to the process of atonement for the individual. The self-purification does not happen alone or in isolation from the community. The self-purification “has its peak” in the public speech act of confession of sin.⁵⁵ This restored “I” not only needs the community for its “self-sanctification,” the restoration is also a reconciliation with other Jews as well. While each person is responsible for her own actions, the process of *teshuvah* is to occur within and for community. Not only do others provide encouragement, the practices of *teshuvah* bring about reconciliation with fellow sisters and brothers of creation. Hoffman notes that Judaism does not have a type of personal confession as is prevalent in Roman Catholicism. Instead there is a communal recitation of a fixed litany of errors at specified times during the year. Curiously the concern is that individual confession in worship may cause some to neglect the personal confession to persons. “The Rabbis are unanimous on the point that even on Yom Kippur, liturgical confession in public does not obviate our having to seek forgiveness directly and personally from the people we have wronged. Nor does confession permit us to repeat our old, erring ways, even if we do intend to ask forgiveness again next year.”⁵⁶

Moreover, the communal confession within Yom Kippur liturgy moves beyond simply my sins. The sins confessed in the Yom Kippur liturgy are mostly those “which the individuals present have not themselves committed.”⁵⁷ Moreover, “the purpose of public confession is to facilitate the process whereby the community as a whole stands together in common recognition that all people fail at times to live up to their highest possibilities.”⁵⁸ This awareness hopes to encourage the forgiveness of others as well as undue debilitating guilt over sin, while “committed all the more strongly to work with others to eradicate the human pain and suffering

⁵⁰ Cohen, *RR*, 169.

⁵¹ Cohen, 202.

⁵² Steinsaltz, 55-56.

⁵³ Moses Maimonides, “Laws of Repentance,” *Mishna Torah: The Book of Knowledge*, ed. Moses Hyamson (Jerusalem: Feldheim, 1981).

⁵⁴ Cohen, 205.

⁵⁵ Kepnes, 71.

⁵⁶ *Gates of Understanding* 2, 119.

⁵⁷ *Gates of Understanding* 2, 119.

⁵⁸ *Gates of Understanding* 2, 121.

which human beings have wrought. The very *act* of public contrition may be as necessary as its content.⁵⁹ One can only imagine if those outside the three monotheistic religions would think first of those faiths as a people who confess their sins while seeking to eradicate the pain and suffering of the world. Unfortunately, too often it is not penitence and confession but violence that denotes Jews, Christians, and Muslims to outsiders.

Part of the preparation of *teshuvah* includes seeking out those whom been have wronged in the past year and apologizing. The *Mishna* affirms that “for transgressions against God, the Day of Atonement atone; but for the transgressions of one human being against another, the Day of Atonement does not atone until we have made peace with one another.”⁶⁰ Lawrence Hoffman makes another important claim: “Our tradition is unequivocal: all the fasting in the world is useless, unless we seek out the people we have hurt to ask their forgiveness directly.”⁶¹ Curiously this celebrates that forgiveness from God alone is not enough. This is reminiscent of Jesus’ command to be reconciled when approaching the altar and remember you and your sister are relationally broken. Jesus commands to leave your gift at the altar, go and be reconciled, then come back with your sister before God (Matt 5:23-24).

For the *ba’al teshuvah* (a neophyte who becomes religious observant) this is not to be an individual quest taken in isolation from the community and mature persons of the faith. As one lives into the *mitzvot* Rabbi Steinsaltz suggests that “it is best to rely on the example of a more experienced practitioner, and to consult books later on, either for the sake of review or to explore the varieties of custom.”⁶² Such following is a training of discipleship. “Judaism is not based on spontaneous insights and personal ‘religious’ experiences. Judaism is not invented anew by every Jew but is already there, a given, objective system that individual Jews need to internalize.”⁶³ This both celebrates individual responsibility while judging autonomous relativity false. Within the importance of the *ba’al teshuvah*’s fortitude and determination to make the break from the past, this is not simply an individual pilgrimage. “Judaism is not just a matter of individual commitment. However, personal one’s involvement may be, Judaism always entails a linkup with past and future generations.”⁶⁴ The life of transformation being embarked for the *ba’al teshuvah* is both very personal and very corporate, impacting the world. In the Jewish Orthodox tradition, *teshuvah* calls for the breaking of the past even if that means with current family members not within the faith. As such, social connections are vital as persons may be adopted into a new family. First a family (perhaps new) “is required for the fulfillment of a whole set of *mitzvot*, and the *minyan*, which is needed to fulfill the communal aspects of Judaism—the Jews as ‘the congregation of the Lord.’”⁶⁵ Persons live in *teshuvah* together.

Reconciled With the *Ger* (*Stranger*)

Persons are reconciled to God and others in the faith, however, the imagination moves into reconciliation beyond fellow Jews, but also with the *Ger*- stranger. The Abrahamic call and vocation is to be a blessing to the nations. (Gen. 12) For Cohen, *teshuvah* (*Versöhnung* –repentance or reconciliation) is a *leitmotif*. Often the discourse regarding the Jews as a holy nation included a polarization of the elect monotheistic Jews (us) vs. the idolatrous foreigners (them). However, Cohen highlights the important teachings of how the stranger is to be treated. In the development of the stranger –*Ger* (Ex. 12:49, Num. 15:15, and Lev.

⁵⁹ *Gates of Understanding* 2, 121.

⁶⁰ *Gates of Understanding* 2, 110, quoting from the *Mishna*, *Yoma* 8.9, p. 251.

⁶¹ *Gates of Understanding* 2, 110

⁶² Steinsaltz, 27

⁶³ Kepnes, *Jewish Liturgical Reasoning*, 15

⁶⁴ Steinsaltz, 62.

⁶⁵ Steinsaltz, 70

24:22) there is a call to love the stranger as one of your own (Lev 19:33). This for Cohen does not deny the challenge of idolatry, but does not locate the idolatry in categories made of people, “the non-Jew.” Rather, idolatry is a problem all persons face, including Jews.

Cohen’s emphasis of the love for *Ger* moves away from the Kantian focus on the autonomous self and deontological ethics, to Scripture and liturgy emphasizing the hope of the restoration and reconciliation of Creation.⁶⁶ Such notions of Teshuvah should thus keep this image as a focal point. This then also connects to Martin Buber’s insight into the I-Thou relations. Hence, Cohen’s ethics for the individual is never static, but on ongoing project. “The moral individual is an infinite task molded by a web of relations that include the ‘Thou’ and the ‘We’ and is ruled by the external standards of the heteronomous law.”⁶⁷ Reconciliation with the world is central for teshuvah.

Yom Kippur and Teshuvah: Redemption of the World

The imagination of *teshuvah* moves beyond individual reconciliation and participates in the World-to-Come. “Although the liturgies of the cultural-linguistic system of Judaism function to support the moral Jewish self, they do not end in personal selfhood. As liturgies are performed by the entire community they also address the needs of the larger community and the larger world. Here liturgy is about issues of redemption and Messianism.”⁶⁸ There is an important balance for the responsibility of the individual, while also noting that a primary *telos* moves beyond the sanctification of an individual. The journey of the *ba’al teshuvah* is not aimed at moral adjustments to a number of *mitzvot* (a religious commandment); “to accept Judaism in its entirety is not merely to set aside a certain corner of one’s life as a sanctuary, outside the everyday flow of affairs, but to alter deeply that flow itself.”⁶⁹ This is about immersion into a new world. While Steinsaltz appears to keep the focus on the individual, Laurence Hoffman notes how such *teshuvah* participates in a transformation of all of creation. Hence, the “life of holiness is not done in monastic seclusion, but out in the world.”⁷⁰

It is crucial to note that while Yom Kippur does focus on individual repentance and transformation of the individual, such a transformation imagines this as a participation of the further coming of the World-to-Come.

The self-examination and self-purification that the liturgy of Yom Kippur initiates does not end the realm of the individual. The purified and atoned individual cannot remain as a single one and in the white purity of the Yom Kippur. The individual I, created by the liturgy is quickly moved ‘in symbolic transference’ to become a representatives of the purified community Israel. The I as Israel must then move out of the synagogue and into the world to work for its redemption. The suffering that repentance, fasting, and atonement require the individual to undergo is an idealized and symbolic liturgical suffering that is, in its turn, transferred to the suffering in the world, which Israel undergoes for the sake of humankind. Therefore, Cohen sees Yom Kippur as a process of educating the self, the community, and Israel for ‘the great calling that has been allotted to them by their unique God’.⁷¹

In this way Cohen is clear that Yom Kippur is a “symbol for the redemption of mankind [sic].”⁷² Hoffman also notes that one’s salvation also participates in the bringing of Time-to-Come. “Keeping the commandments

⁶⁶ Kepnes, *Jewish Liturgical Reasoning*, 65.

⁶⁷ Kepnes, *Jewish Liturgical Reasoning*, 66.

⁶⁸ Kepnes, 75.

⁶⁹ Steinsaltz, 11.

⁷⁰ Steinsaltz, 53.

⁷¹ Kepnes, 75 with internal citation of Cohen, 235.

⁷² Cohen, 235.

guarantees that some day, Time-Now will end, and the grandeur of Time-Past will be reinstated as Time-to-Come.”⁷³ It is this cycle that provides meaning for history “One sins and is punished. But one atones and obeys God, and one waits for Time-to-Come.”⁷⁴ With the use of myth, time lives outside of chronology, a moral history develops which is a grid placed upon all events in Time-Now. Time-Now began at the fall of the Temple and” it will end with the coming of the Messiah.”⁷⁵

An example of such an imagination is seen in a prayer for the Morning service of Yom Kippur. In the morning service there is an emphasis to be reminded of the frailty of our life’s existence.

We are tenants in the house of life; our days on earth are but a span.

Time, like a river, rolls on, flowing year after year into the sea of eternity.

Its passing leaves bitter memories of hours misspent.

Now they come back to accuse us, and we tremble to think of them.

But Your purpose gives meaning to our fleeting days, Your teaching guides us, and Your love sustains us....

Deliver us from bondage to the past; release us from the stranglehold of evil habits; make us free to start afresh.

Let this be for us the beginning of a new season of health and life.

Liberate us from the fear of death, and from the scornful laughter that mocks our labors.

Though our lives be short, let them be full; hold our mortal days in Your hands as eternal moments.

We, dust and ashes, are endowed with divinity; compounded of clay, we live in dimensions clay cannot enter, regions where the air vibrates with Your presence.

*Judge us less harshly that we can judge ourselves; judge us with mercy, O Fountain of life, in whose light we see light!*⁷⁶

Such a prayer appears to move persons off of the Present-Now and onto the Time-to-Come. Through the prayer and fasting on Yom Kippur, which is a participation of the sanctification into the image of God work “for the alleviation of suffering in the world and the proclamation of the universal message of the unique God for all humankind.”⁷⁷ Such prayers of Yom Kippur offer a transformation and longing for a love of God into a love of the congregation.

Cohen also then suggests that “liturgical or public prayer exceeds philosophical knowledge because it moves the individual in successive stages from the personal, to the particular collective of the people Israel, and then to universal humanity. Liturgical prayer opens the individual to the broader collective and universal concerns through the incorporation of the concepts and images of prophetic Messianism.”⁷⁸ Therefore, the grammar of *teshuva* as a means of self-sanctification affirms the responsibility and importance of the individual, yet also casts out an imagination much broader. This is seen in Yom Kippur’s concluding *Aleinu* prayer that looks toward the establishment of the “Kingdom of God.” “In the *Aleinu*, the establishment of the congregation Israel is placed as a first step that leads to the future messianic fulfillment for universal humanity.”⁷⁹

⁷³ Hoffman, *Beyond the Test*, 85.

⁷⁴ Hoffman, *Beyond the Test*, 86.

⁷⁵ Hoffman, *Beyond the Test*, 102.

⁷⁶ *Gates of Repentance*, 294-295.

⁷⁷ Kepnes, 76.

⁷⁸ Kepnes, 76.

⁷⁹ Kepnes, 76.

Lent

Theology of Repentance

Lent is a season of discipline, devotion, and preparation. Lent begins with the celebration of Ash Wednesday, a day when Christians have ashes imposed on their foreheads in the sign of the cross to embody penitence and mourning. During this season, with the ashes declaring the mortality of life, the church mourns the destructive effect of sin on the life of all creation, confronting its own helplessness to bring salvation. The ashes remind the church of its utter need and dependence on God for redemption. While Ash Wednesday starts Lent with “a bold confrontation of death,”⁸⁰ the Church is not left on the ash heap, but, through the practices of Lent, is provided the opportunity to embrace and live a fullness of life not possible without the ash.

Lent is a time of intense communal self-denial, rejecting the trappings of a comfortable lifestyle of pleasure, excess, and self-centered living.⁸¹ The practice of self-denial can reveal places in the body more empty than a person realized, places that were unsatisfactorily filled with an abundance of food and clothes or with status and prestige. Through a communal practice of self-denial, Christians seek illumination for places where the voice of God is muted by self-fulfillment and gratification by giving up things in life that inhibit the lavish love of God from flowing. Self-denial can reveal how practices of excessive indulgence not only rot the body and soul but drive out God and salvation, while exacerbating the suffering and despair for fellow humans.

In this way, Lenten asceticism is not about piety or determination, nor is it simply a forty day vacation from pleasure and comfort, but is an opportunity for repentance from “our senseless excesses and our excursions into sin, our breaches of justice, our failures of honesty, our estrangement from God...our absorbing self-gratifications”⁸² that place the desires of self above the needs of others. The repentance then spurns a purification of the entire person as Christians seek more right and holy ways of living.⁸³ *In this way, the discipline, devotion, and denial of Lent is not simply a sabbatical from hedonism.* Through Lent, as we are called to be reconciled to God, we are also called to be open to the world, to share the gift of life with others. “The Forty Days of Lent is the supreme time of the church year for repentance, reconciliation, and return.”⁸⁴ Moreover, Lent is also a time for those who have fallen away to be brought back to repentance in the community of faith. Lent, through intentional denial, opens persons to God and others in ways that provide a communion of brokenness opened to healing. Yet this process of repentance is not simply individualistic. “Lent counters individualism with the communalism of the church ‘s society, with its annual span during which members of the local church consider the failures in their individual lives and the church body as a whole considers its life.”⁸⁵

Removing the idolatry of self-gratification, life can be found in journeying with Christ as he walks in the shadow of the cross. This “is the pivot from self-gratification to self-denial, from seeking acclaim to risking scorn, from the seduction of power to the prospect of suffering.”⁸⁶ Because this is the life journey to which Christ calls the church – placing the pursuit of God before the pursuit of selfish gain– Christians can only begin to experience life when they are willing to die with Christ.

⁸⁰ Laurence Hull Stookey, *Calendar: Christ's Time for the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 84.

⁸¹ Bobby Gross, *Living the Christian Year* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 132.

⁸² Joan Chittister, *The Liturgical Year* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 118.

⁸³ This idea is drawn from both Stookey, *Calendar: Christ's Time for the Church*, 84; and Edward Hays, *The Lenten Labyrinth* (Leavenworth: Forest of Peace Publishing, 1994), 72.

⁸⁴ Martin Connell, *Eternity Today: On the Liturgical Year Volume 2* (New York: Continuum , 2006), 54.

⁸⁵ Connell, *Eternity Today*, 54-55.

⁸⁶ Gross, *Living the Christian Year*, 129.

Theology of Compassion: Communion in Suffering

Lent is the remembrance of God's extension of salvation to creation through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. During Lent, the church refuses to evade suffering, violence, abandonment, aloneness, and death, choosing to live alongside those who have no choice but to daily endure these conditions.⁸⁷ This season reminds the church that

Christianity is not a religion of glory, it is a religion of the cross...because it is the Good News of a God who did not stay in the remote protection of heaven, far from the struggle of earth. On the contrary, God came into our life through his Son and here he drank to the full the cup of suffering, temptation, and sorrow.⁸⁸

During Lent, the church is invited to drink deeply of that cup new covenant; the cup that will bring salvation and grace.⁸⁹ Lent's imagination is a heightened call for the church to live as the body of Christ, sharing in Christ's sufferings and being present with those who suffer the abandonment of God. Jürgen Moltmann affirms, "the suffering of abandonment is overcome by the suffering of love, which is not afraid of what is sick and ugly, but accepts it and takes it to itself in order to heal it. Through his own abandonment by God, the crucified Christ brings God to those who are abandoned by God."⁹⁰ Christ's seemingly senseless journey into shared life with the marginalized and oppressed, whose life ethos was pain, alienation, and suffering, brought communion with God to those who had been abandoned by God. During Lent, Christians are invited to repent of their failure to come alongside the abandoned and become Christ's footsteps with those who are abandoned by God, being God to the people, doing so in love for the other as an act of doxology to God.⁹¹ Because of this, "to follow Jesus is joyful"⁹² for it is the living out of God.

Theology of Facing Death

Faithful Lenten practice therefore, is not a sentimental, sugar-coated nostalgic reflection of Christ's life and death, but a participation in the very life and death of Christ in the physical body of the Church (2 Cor. 4:10). Early on for the church in Jerusalem, Rome and Milan, "Lent was the time for the final formation of those to be baptized at Easter."⁹³ Beginning with Ash Wednesday, the invitation of Lent asserts the fragility of life and the reality of a physical death, conceding that from dust all come, and to dust all return. Therefore, the only hope for redemption is through Christ who, out of his love and faithfulness to the Father, trudged knowingly on toward his death, persevering through suffering.⁹⁴ Anamnetically by the Spirit, the church walks with Christ in the shadow of the cross, a journey that leads inescapably to a painful, disgraceful, despairing death. In this way, "the Lenten call [is] to both foolishness and profound dignity."⁹⁵

The journey of Lent leads to Easter and the glorious resurrection, but all too often the church chooses to skip over the suffering of the journey and go straight to the glory; it is as if "we would rather have the

⁸⁷ Craig Hovey, *To Share in the Body: A Theology of Martyrdom for Today's Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2008), 111.

⁸⁸ William Hordern and John Otwell, *Lent* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 13, 15.

⁸⁹ Hovey, *To Share in the Body: A Theology of Martyrdom for Today's Church*, 81.

⁹⁰ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 46.

⁹¹ Hovey, *To Share in the Body: A Theology of Martyrdom for Today's Church*, 47-48, 110.

⁹² Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 56.

⁹³ Thomas J. Talley, "The Origins of the Liturgical Year (New York, New York: Pueblo publishing, 1984), 174. Talley also demonstrates that Lent may have been a merging of two traditions the preparation for baptism as well as the 40 day fast in commemoration of Jesus' fasting in the wilderness. See Bradshaw's summary of Talley's argument in *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 184.

⁹⁴ Hovey, *To Share in the Body: A Theology of Martyrdom for Today's Church*, 86.

⁹⁵ Hays, *The Lenten Labyrinth*, 29.

resurrection without the cross.”⁹⁶ However, “the church is constrained to insist that there is no route to an empty tomb except by way of the cross.”⁹⁷ To skip over the suffering in the desire for the glory of the resurrection is a failure to see the kingdom of God coming through the suffering and through the refusal to avoid suffering at the cost of obedience.⁹⁸ In order to have the wonder and hope of the resurrection, the church must faithfully follow Jesus in his journey in the shadow of the cross.⁹⁹ Christ’s “resurrection ‘does not evacuate the cross’ (I Cor. 1:17), but fills it with eschatology and saving significance.”¹⁰⁰ The resurrection is not a reversal or correction of the suffering and injustice of the cross; rather, it shows the end of the abandonment and the finality of death, fully displaying the power of life over death.

During Lent, the church practices self-denial and lives into the life, death, and resurrection of Christ through the addition of new practices, subtraction of distractions and/or excesses, and the intensification of practices already characterizing the Christian life.¹⁰¹ New practices, often including “prayer and Scripture meditation, moral inventory and behavior change, fasting and other forms of abstinence, acts of generosity and service,”¹⁰² are not simply temporary inconveniences; rather, they should be intentional, habit or temper-forming disciplines that deeply impact life beyond the forty days of Lent.¹⁰³ “Lenten disciplines are not temporary deletions or additions but spiritual exercises that permanently alter us.”¹⁰⁴ The practices should lead Christians to seek reconciliation with God and neighbor and to participate in the sufferings of others, seeking new ways of living that bring healing for the ugly and abandoned.

Fasting is one of the most widely practiced Lenten disciplines. Fasting is a time “to turn from the bread of the pantry to the bread of life and in this humbler state to rediscover our deepest hunger and remember our truest food.”¹⁰⁵ Fasting is not only a time for seeking sustenance from God but is a time to share the bread of the pantry and the bread of life with those who hunger for both. During a time of fasting, the church should seek solidarity with those in whom physical, emotional, and psychological hunger are not chosen but are the gatekeepers of their lives. Therefore, fasting is best practiced in community, where those with food can share with those who have none, bringing hope into the lives of the outcast. Moreover, “Lent is unique in the liturgical year because members of the church conscientiously turn from the excesses not to remind God of humanity, but to remind themselves of the constancy of God’s love.”¹⁰⁶

The Church, during Lent, lives in the tension of the already but not-yet kingdom.¹⁰⁷ The church recognizes the peaceful kingdom of God while simultaneously wrestling with the senselessness of violence and suffering, longing for the kingdom to be fully realized; the Church daily lives the resurrection of Jesus and celebrates new life while journeying through Jesus’s sufferings and participating in his death. Lent is a confrontation with our own mortality while grasping an understanding that life continues on after death. “This is the wisdom of Lent: to acknowledge our finitude and failings and to turn to the God who turns to us in mercy.

⁹⁶ Hovey, *To Share in the Body: A Theology of Martyrdom for Today’s Church*, 69.

⁹⁷ Stookey, *Calendar: Christ’s Time for the Church*, 89.

⁹⁸ Hovey, *To Share in the Body: A Theology of Martyrdom for Today’s Church*, 69.

⁹⁹ Michael Ford, ed., *Eternal Seasons* (Notre Dame: Sorin Books, 2004), 83.

¹⁰⁰ Moltmann, *Crucified God*, 182.

¹⁰¹ Chittister, *The Liturgical Year*, 110-111.

¹⁰² Gross, *Living the Christian Year*, 128.

¹⁰³ Stookey, *Calendar: Christ’s Time for the Church*, 82.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 82.

¹⁰⁵ Gross, *Living the Christian Year*, 135.

¹⁰⁶ Connell, 58.

¹⁰⁷ Chittister, *The Liturgical Year*, 109.

So we practice the creaturely humility of fasting, the spiritual humility of prayer, the moral humility of repentance, and, vicariously, the sacrificial humility of Christ himself.¹⁰⁸

All the practices of self-denial in Lent are a participation in the Kingdom coming more fully. Martin Connell notes that “believers do not discipline themselves, their bodies, their souls as heroic self-sacrifices for winning God’s attention or favor, but as a way of making them more able to recognize God’s grace in the places where, the times when, and the people in whom they least expect it.”¹⁰⁹ As Lent teaches new ways of responding, the church learns how “to love friends and enemies alike, to respond with kindness rather than revenge.”¹¹⁰ The practices of Lent refine the hearts of Christians, developing holiness through the suffering with others, so that the church can turn and bring the beautiful into the dwelling of the ugly and can share a fullness of God with those who have been abandoned.¹¹¹ The disciplines of Lent teach the Christians to give up the pursuit of selfish indulgence for the pursuit of the kingdom.

Ramadan

Now the paper considers the imagination of Ramadan beginning with the five pillars of Islām.

Five Pillars of the Muslim Faith

The five pillars are the essential beliefs of the Islāmic faith and practice. The five pillars all bear witness to the first pillar, celebrating the oneness and singleness of God. This celebration of Allāh is not simply a mental proposition requiring cognitive assent; rather, it is an ethical imagination and way of being that is offered to the believers. The *Al-Sabit* tradition describes this singleness of God,

tawhid as an ethical concept involves more than anything else the relinquishing of all sense of personal ownership or possession... if the goods of the material world become the goals of a person’s life, they are functionally equivalent to idols... for this reason to be a true *muwahhid* or affirmers of God’s oneness, the human being must divest himself of everything but Allāh—the One God, Absolute, and Unique.¹¹²

The first Pillar is the *Shahadah*, the act of bearing witness, the primary tenant of the faith which confesses, “There is no god but Allāh and Muhammad is his prophet.” This confession places Muslims in a position of submission to the one God. The second pillar is prayer, *Salat*. Muslims, pray five times a day, before the sunrise, at noon, midday, just after sunset and in the evening, facing East toward the great Mosque in Mecca. The third pillar *zakat*, also known as the poor tax, requires Muslims to yearly give a tithe, roughly 2.5% of their income to be distributed to the poor. The fourth pillar, *Sawn*, is that of fasting. Muslims most vividly practice the requirements of the fast during the season of Ramadan, a month-long fast, during the ninth month of the Islāmic lunar calendar. The fifth and final pillar is a pilgrimage to Mecca, which takes place in the first days of the month of *Dhul-Hijjah*. All Muslims who are physically and financially able to make the journey and perform the prescribed rites are obligated to participate in the lengthy and rigorous journey at least once in their lives.

Qur’ān on Ramadan

As the fourth pillar, Ramadan is a celebration of the revelation of the *The Holy Qur’ān* to the Prophet Muhammed by the Angel Gabriel that occurred in the ninth month of the Arabian year.

¹⁰⁸ Gross, *Living the Christian Year*, 128-139.

¹⁰⁹ Martin Connell, *Eternity Today*, 57.

¹¹⁰ Hays, *The Lenten Labyrinth*, 16.

¹¹¹ Chittister, *The Liturgical Year*, 125.

¹¹² *The Oxford History of Islām*, Ed. John L. Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 101-102.

The name *Qur'ān* really refers to two root-meanings, for on the one hand it signifies *a book in which are gathered together* all the Divine Books, a distinction to which the *Qur'ān* itself lays claim in 98:3 and elsewhere (R), on the other hand, it means *a book that is or should be read...* The month of Ramadan is thus a memorial of the revelation of the *Qur'ān*.¹¹³

It seems significant to ground the practices of Ramadan in celebration for the gift of *Qur'ān*. This is not about masochism, but about thanksgiving.¹¹⁴

The Holy *Qur'ān* teaches concerning Ramadan:

The month of Ramadān is that in which the *Qur'ān* was revealed, a guidance to men and clear proofs of the guidance and the Criterion. So whoever of you is present in the month, he shall fast therein, and whoever is sick or on a journey, (he shall fast) a (like) number of other days. Allāh desires ease for you and He desires not hardship for you, and (He desires) that you should complete the number and that you should exalt the greatness of Allāh for having guided you and that you may give thanks.¹¹⁵

This teaching appears grounded in Allāh offering Ramadān as a gift, a gift of remembrance and thanks that is practiced through bodily preparation and purification. Within this thanksgiving and remembrance, Ramadan is an invitation to purity, a purity through intense discipline, including fasting. Furthermore, within the centrality of fasting it is clear this is focused on “exalting the greatness of Allāh.” Exalting the greatness of Allāh is not about needless suffering, but joyful means to life.

With this background, the paper will consider the general practice of Ramadan and a deeper exploration into the power and imagination of fasting.

The Celebration of Ramadan

On the 27th day of the eight month in the Muslim calendar, called *Sha'ban*, persons go outside looking for the crescent of a new moon. Upon seeing it persons will point and exclaim “*Ramadan Mubarak*,” which means “Have a blessed and happy Ramadan.”¹¹⁶ During Ramadan persons fast all day from the moment the sun rises till it sets. Such fasting includes sex, eating and drinking, or putting anything in one’s mouth. Such fasting during the day lasts every day for a month. During Ramadan families rise early before sunset for a meal called *Suhur*. Enough food and drink is consumed to last throughout the daylight hours.¹¹⁷ After this meal the family performs a morning prayer called a *Fajr*, which is the first of five daily prayers. After prayer, readings from the *Holy Qur'ān* occur. Such fasting for Muslims aims to “clean and purify their minds.”¹¹⁸

Iftar: Breaking the Fasts

As the sun begins to set each night of Ramadan the family is busy making preparations to break their fast with a meal called *iftar*. Muslims often begin the meal by eating a date and thanking Allāh for providing the strength to fast, practice connected back to Muhammed. After this date is consumed the family performs the evening prayer called *Maghrib*. After such prayers and confirming the sun has fully set with the moon visible, a large dinner is shared. Such a feast is full of eating, drinking, joy and communion of sharing their life. After the

¹¹³ Maulana Muhammed Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: Arabic Text with English Translation and Commentary* (Dublin, Ohio: Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islām Lahore, 2002) 2: 185b, (pg. 80-81).

¹¹⁴ Maulana Muhammed Ali notes that “The root meaning of Ramadān is *excessiveness of heat*” as the weather in this month is excessively hot. (2:185a, pg. 80).

¹¹⁵ *The Holy Qur'an*, Surah al-Baqarah 2:185 (*The Holy Qur'an: Arabic Text with English Translation and Commentary* by Maulana Muhammed Ali [Dublin, Ohio: Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at Islām Lahore, 2002], 80-81).

¹¹⁶ Ghazi, Suhaib Hamib, *Ramadan* (New York: Holiday House, 1996), 6. *This book does not have page numbers so the numbers assigned are based on my pagination through counting.

¹¹⁷ Ghazi, Suhaib Hamib, *Ramadan*, 9.

¹¹⁸ Ghazi, Suhaib Hamib, *Ramadan*, 13

meal, Allāh is thanked and praised again for the good health to survive the fast and for the food that enables the fast to be broken. At the conclusion of the *Iftar*, all are satisfied. After the *Iftar* the family goes to the mosque for prayer and worship of Allāh. Special prayers called *Taraweeh* are offered during Ramadan. As part of the worship all the families bring food to share with the poor who may have not had a full and proper *Iftar*.¹¹⁹ After the *Imam* leads in prayer and reading from the *Holy Qur’ān* persons greet each other proclaiming “*Assalamu Alaikum! Ramadan Mubarak!*” (May peace be upon you! Have a blessed and happy Ramadan!).¹²⁰

Toward the end of Ramadan, Muslims again look to the skies searching for the new moon. The sliver of the new moon announces the end of Ramadan. The next day is the holiday of *Eid ul-Fitr* a celebration for the gift of Ramadan. Muslims all gather together in fine clothes to celebrate the successful fasting of Ramadan.¹²¹

Fasting During Ramadan

Fasting from food, drink, and sex during daylight hours is about purity and thus also includes fasting from unkind thoughts and speech, forbidding activities such as gossip and profanity. *The Holy Qur’ān* teaches “O you who believe, fasting is prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those before you, so that you may guard against evil.”¹²² Maulana Muhammed Ali commenting on the *Qur’ān* 2:183 notes that many faiths throughout the world fast including Hindus and Christians.¹²³ However, he notes that Islām introduced new meaning into the practice of fasting. “Before Islām, fasting meant the suffering of some privation in times of mourning and sorrow; in Islām, it becomes an institution for the improvement of the moral and spiritual condition of man.”¹²⁴ Fasting is a practice handed down and is a guard and protector from evil. So the question is begged how does fasting help guard evil?

Humanity learns how to shun evil through fasting by abstaining not simply from food, but from evil.

In fact, abstention from food is only a step to make a man realize that if he can, in obedience to Divine injunctions, abstain from that which is otherwise lawful, how much more necessary is it that he should abstain from the evil ways which are forbidden by God. All the institutions of Islām are, in fact, practical steps leading to perfect purification of the soul.¹²⁵

Fasting is both about discipline and habituating oneself to recognize that one’s primary goal is to worship and serve Allāh. Yet such bodily fasting also trains persons to prepare for the hardships in life that may come. “But along with moral elevation, which is aimed at in fasting, another object seems to be hinted at. i.e., that the Muslims should habituate themselves to suffer tribulations and hardships physically as well.”¹²⁶ This does not appear to be about masochism but training that when one comes up against moral evil, or the evil of physical suffering and torture, one has been trained to endure and not yield.

The fast intentionally “disrupts everyday senses of space and time, as daytime becomes a time of austerity and nighttime a time of communal celebration.”¹²⁷ In this way the Ramadan fast promotes a new liturgical rhythm in the life of the Muslim community culminating the remembrance of the “night of destiny,” (*Lay-lat al-qadr*) recalling the night Muhammad received the divine word of the *Qur’ān* from Allāh. This event

¹¹⁹ Ghazi, Suhaib Hamib, *Ramadan*, 20.

¹²⁰ Ghazi, Suhaib Hamib, *Ramadan*, 23.

¹²¹ Ghazi, Suhaib Hamib, *Ramadan*, 26.

¹²² *The Holy Qur’ān*, 2:183, pg. 79.

¹²³ *The Holy Qur’ān* 2:183a, pg. 79.

¹²⁴ *The Holy Qur’ān* 2:183a, pg. 79.

¹²⁵ *Qur’ān* 2:183a, pg. 79.

¹²⁶ *Qur’ān* 2:183a, pg. 79.

¹²⁷ “Early Muslim Spirituality and Mysticism,” in *The Muslim Almanac*, ed. Azim A. Nanji. (New York: International Thomson Publishing Company, 1996), 216.

marks "... the moment of closest intimacy between the divine and the human,"¹²⁸ through the thirty days of fasting Muslims seek a similar intimacy with God.

The Ramadan fast functions as a primary means of purifying the soul by leading Muslims into full submission to God through self-denial. "Islām" means submission, thus setting an imagination that everything done out of obedience places the Muslim in proper submission to God, which is the foundation of the purification of the soul (*tazkiyah al-nafs*). This purification of the Muslim by God can be understood in terms of salvation.¹²⁹ While humans were tasked to be "vice-regents" of God's earth, often under the performance of vice, creation becomes the highest aim. "Whoever desires this world's life and its finery—We repay them their deeds therein, and they are not made to suffer loss in it."¹³⁰ According to Zarabozo, the "purification of the soul" is "the process in which the healthy elements in the soul are fostered, built upon and added to while any invading contaminants are removed..."¹³¹ Such denials do not carry a specter of Gnosticism, for the things from which one fasts, food, drink and sexual intercourse are not evil,¹³² rather they seek to embrace the goodness of creation as a means to love God and care for the other, while always resisting the worship and desire of creation over the Creator.

The Importance of Motivations

The imagination of Ramadan resembles a means of grace, a physical remembrance that God alone is the source of all life and nothing else should ever be placed in a higher position of authority. Though the Law prescribes ritual adherence to liturgical activities such as Ramadan, the Law is calling for something much more than ritual practice. Intention is key to fulfilling the Law's requirements regarding the fast, for if the practice is done without proper intention, "the Muslim's obligation has not been met."¹³³ The intention for practicing is a turning point that makes the fast either a means of grace or renders it useless in the life of the Muslim community.

Through the month long fast Muslims are brought face to face with their real motives for fasting.¹³⁴ Done rightly, the Ramadan fast is an act of worship that flows from a pure love for God, not obligation; this calls Muslims into a deep personal sacrifice simply because the fast is special and beloved by God. In the same way, from the love which believers practice the fast, believers also embrace the fear of God and are made aware of God's presence, and if practiced properly, the fear of God should increase and believers fasting should become more attuned to the presence of God in their lives.¹³⁵

Break-fasts at Night

Fasting occurs during the day, while each night the fasting ceases. Al-Ghazali notes there are three grades of Fasting: ordinary, special, and extra-special.¹³⁶ *Ordinary fasting* is abstaining from food, drink, and sexual satisfaction. This is the most common fasting celebrated in Ramadan. *Special Fasting* is keeping all parts of one's body and organs free from sin. "*Extra-special Fasting* means fasting of the heart from unworthy concerns and worldly thoughts, in total disregard of everything but God, Great and Glorious is He."¹³⁷ Persons are instructed at night that "it is make lawful for you to go in to your wives on the night of the fast...So now be

¹²⁸ *The Muslim Almanac*, 217.

¹²⁹ Jamaal al-Din m. Zarabozo, *Purification of the Soul: Concept, Process and Means* (Denver: Al-Basheer Company for Publications and Translations, 2002), 56.

¹³⁰ Qur'ān, 11:15, 457.

¹³¹ Zarabozo, *Purification of the Soul: Concept, Process and Means*, 77.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 238.

¹³³ Amina m. Steinfels, "ritual," in *The Key Themes in the Study of Islam*, Ed. Jamal J. Elias (Oxford: Oneworld publications, 2010), 308.

¹³⁴ Abd al' Ati, Hammudah, *Islam in Focus* (Beltsville : Amana Publications, 1998), 87.

¹³⁵ Zarabozo, *Purification of the Soul: Concept, Process and Means*, 243-244.

¹³⁶ Al-Ghazali, *Inner Dimensions of Islamic Worship* (Leicestershire, United Kingdom: The Islamic Foundation 1983), 75.

¹³⁷ Al-Ghazali, *Inner Dimensions of Islamic Worship*, 75.

in contact with them and seek what Allāh has ordained for you, and eat and drink until the whiteness of the day becomes distinct from the blackness of the night at dawn, then complete the fast till nightfall, and touch then not while you keep to the mosques.”¹³⁸ The day is for fasting, the night is for celebration. Maulana Muhammad Ali draws attention to the connection between sex, eating, and drinking by commenting on this text. Desire for sexual relations

is a natural desire and man could not live without satisfying it as he could not live without satisfying a natural desire, the relation of husband and wife has higher ends in view. They serve as a garment for each other, i.e., they are a means of protection, comfort and even embellishment for each other, and the weakness of one is made up by the strength of the other.¹³⁹

When breaking the fasts the celebration is not one of gluttony, but a disciplined celebration. Al-Ghazali notes that over-indulging should be strongly avoided when breaking Fasts. “There is no receptacle more odious to God, Great, and Glorious is He, than a belly stuffed full with lawful food.”¹⁴⁰ At some point one can dishonor and make invalid the fast by how one breaks the fast. “Of what use is the Fast as means of conquering God’s enemy and abating appetite, if at the time of breaking it one not only makes up for all one has missed during the daytime, but perhaps also indulges in a variety of extra foods?”¹⁴¹ This would be to miss the point. “Fasting is to experience hunger and to check desire, in order to reinforce the soul in piety.”¹⁴² Moreover, the goal in the evening breaking of the Fast is not to catch up in eating, drinking, and sexual pleasure that was missed, but to be able to sustain the Fast for the entire duration. The Fast in its difficulty is to be faced and experienced fully.

As such, Al-Ghazali notes that sleeping during the day is also discouraged as a way to mute or ignore the hunger pangs. Being conscious of the weakening of one’s powers is central to one’s purification of heart.¹⁴³ The Fast is not then really about abstaining, but about facing the weakness and overcoming that leads to purification. An unconscious person who has not had sex, eaten or had drink has stilled missed out on the purification that comes by facing and overcoming the hungers and desires of the body. Moreover, Al-Ghazali also notes that “one should let a certain degree of weakness carry over into the night, making it easier to perform the night Prayers (*tahajjud*) and to recite the litanies (*awrād*)... The Night of Destiny represents the night on which something of this Kingdom is revealed.”¹⁴⁴ Revelation from God is stifled when all of one’s fleshly desires are glutonously satiated. This is a matter for the entire body, stomach, and mind. “Anyone who puts a bag of food between his heart and his breast becomes blind to this revelations. Nor is keeping the stomach empty sufficient to remove the veil, unless one also empties the mind of everything but God, Great and Glorious is He.”¹⁴⁵ It remains that such a fast is to open oneself to more fully acknowledge and hear the God who speaks.

Fasting for Reliance on Allāh and Compassion

The Ramadan fast is imagined in terms of purification through sacrifice and ethical awareness. The *hadith* are accounts of Muhammad’s life gathered by friends and followers; these sayings have full authority in the life of the Muslim community but are not equivalent to the Qur’ān. One of the most authoritative *hadith*

¹³⁸ *The Holy Qur’ān* (2:187, pg. 82-83).

¹³⁹ Maulana Muhammed Ali 2:187a, 82.

¹⁴⁰ Al-Ghazali, *Inner Dimensions of Islamic Worship*, 78.

¹⁴¹ Al-Ghazali, *Inner Dimensions of Islamic Worship*, 78.

¹⁴² Al-Ghazali, *Inner Dimensions of Islamic Worship*, 78.

¹⁴³ Al-Ghazali, *Inner Dimensions of Islamic Worship*, 78.

¹⁴⁴ Al-Ghazali, *Inner Dimensions of Islamic Worship*, 79.

¹⁴⁵ Al-Ghazali, *Inner Dimensions of Islamic Worship*, 79.

sayings is the *Sahih Muslim*, which affirms, “fasting is [the key to] heaven,”¹⁴⁶ because it calls Muslims to sacrifice their physical and emotional selves during the fast for God alone. The pain felt during the sacrifice of the Ramadan fast “acts as a bridge that links the sacrifice to a larger sense of social responsibility... The believer recalls the pain of the person whose ‘fast’ never ends because his stomach is never free from want.”¹⁴⁷ Such a fast invites the experience of pain, reminding Muslims present to the real pain and suffering of many Muslims in the world whose fast does not end upon the sun setting during Ramadan or at the conclusion of it. Such suffering experienced during the fast moves the Muslim to work toward alleviating the forced fasts of many. Again, intention is vital, for the intention of the fast is not merely about a pious posture of love before God, but instead, also keeps the gaze of the Muslim community securely on the suffering of the poor and the oppressed.

Al-Zakat

The fast is also linked to the poor-tax (*Al-Zakat*). The Muslim tradition links the *zakat* collected to free slaves during the time of Prophet Muhammad. Such a tax is not simply about charity and appeasing the guilt of gluttony, but having one’s desires and imaginations formed and rooted in compassion for the other. The fast produces patience and temporarily guides the believers though a journey walking with the poor and oppressed. The experiences of suffering during the fast allow for a spirit of thankfulness to God for all that God has provided. Likewise, through the experiences of suffering the one fasting sees the plight of the poor and needy but also comes face to face with the reality of suffering and can identify with those who suffer.¹⁴⁸ “Ramadan also shows Muslims what it is like to be poor and hungry. As their stomachs roll and growl with hunger they realize how the poor must feel every day. They become thankful and happy with what Allāh has given them.”¹⁴⁹ Tariq Ramadan speaks clearly to the matter when he says, “the quest for proximity to the one [God] can only be experienced and perfected through proximity to the poor: respecting, caring for, and serving them bring one closer to God.”¹⁵⁰ This perspective helps Muslims gain a better understanding of what is important and what is “enough” in life. Careful reflection can lead to generously giving alms or *zakat* to the poor.¹⁵¹

This money (*zakat*) given is for the community—for the mosque’s physical building, for orphans around the world and to help persons without jobs or money. Muslims are also invited to share *Iftar* with their non-Muslim friends. Such fasting not only leads to thankfulness for the blessings that are often assumed within a spirit of entitlement, it also physically embodies the reality of many who are poor and marginalized so that such experiences may foster actions of compassion throughout the year for those who physically have no access to what most Muslims fast during daylight. Such practices of purification foster reconciliation, thankfulness, and compassion. The fast takes Muslims into the life of pain and suffering, bringing them face to face with those who daily suffer without relief, while instilling a spirit of generosity, which in turn, places them closer to God than when they began. The fast also fosters a spirit of unity as all capable Muslims across the globe share in suffering together: the rich fast, coming alongside the poor; the old fast, embracing the young; women fast alongside the men, together making one unified community. Because Muslims avoid harsh or harmful language

¹⁴⁶ *The Oxford History of Islam*, 84.

¹⁴⁷ *The Oxford History of Islam*, 84.

¹⁴⁸ Zarabozo, *Purification of the Soul: Concept, Process and Means*, 242.

¹⁴⁹ Ghazi, Suhaib Hamib, *Ramadan*, 13.

¹⁵⁰ Tariq Ramadan, *In the Footsteps of the Prophet* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 150.

¹⁵¹ Hammudah, *Islam in Focus*, 87-88.

along with any other spirit of anger and hostility during the fast, they are embracing a spirit of non-violence bringing peace to themselves and the unified community.¹⁵²

Muslims are especially encouraged during Ramadan to care for others. “*Islām* teaches them to be loving and caring with each other, as well as with people who are not Muslim. Within thanksgiving, an emphasis of compassion also is a central aspect of Ramadan. Families are encouraged to share their home and food with others at all times, but specifically during Ramadan. It is also noteworthy in the *Qur’ān* (Ch 2:184) that redemption may be effected by giving daily food to a poor man. This connects with the power of Ramadan as being aware and helping with the needs of those who are poor. This verse ends with an encouragement to also engage in costly spontaneous good. “So, whoever does good spontaneously, it is better for him; and that you fast is better for you if you know.”¹⁵³ This fast is *tatawwu'*, or the *spontaneous doing of good*, “but it also means the *doing of an act with effort*, and fasting requires great effort on the part of man.”¹⁵⁴ The emphasis here is not choosing to suffer, simply to suffer, but like an athlete preparing for sport and competition, if one trains in a way where shortcuts are taken or minimal effort is expended, the entire process is cheapened and the invitation to strength is missed. It is again noteworthy that such fasting is more than individual piety, but such fasting of great effort to care for the other, offers an imagination beyond the self.

Moreover, such fasting is also done as a way to assert one’s reliance upon Allāh and not upon the world. Frugality is about not being held captive to the world and to recognize Allāh as the Source of all life. Said Nursi notes that “I live according to the principles of frugality and on the abundance which results from it. I depend upon no-one apart from the One Who provides for me and I have taken the decision not to become obliged to anyone else.”¹⁵⁵ It appears that such obligations to others might cause distraction from one’s devotion to Allāh.

Ramadan Fasting as Jihad

In an intriguing way fasting also captures the imagination of *jihad*. Perseverance in the struggle of the fast, seeking the oneness of God, finding proximity to the poor and suffering in body and spirit illustrates the concept of *Jihad*. Vincent J. Cornell sheds lights on the western idea of *jihad* when he asserts that *jihad*, rightly understood, is not terrorism or a holy war against unbelievers.¹⁵⁶ However, it is important to understand that *jihad* is the pinnacle of the Muslim’s pursuit of God.¹⁵⁷ Zarabozo provides clarity when he says, “*Jihad* can be used in a very comprehensive sense that embodies all forms of sacrificing and standing up for the sake of Allāh.”¹⁵⁸ Therefore, practicing Ramadan is a struggle of *jihad*, seeking God through pain and suffering, and “emptying oneself of everything,”¹⁵⁹ for the sake of the one God, finding reliance on God and not the material world. The struggle of *jihad* in the fast is a true and sincere act of worship in the face of extreme suffering before God, where the believer, not falling from the straightway of *Islām*, seeks to empty him or herself from all but the pursuit of the one God and the purity of the soul. “By participating in *jihad*, by risking one’s life, wealth or even love of the people,...[and] living for the hereafter and not living for the petty things of this world. He is

¹⁵² Ibid., 89,93.

¹⁵³ *Qur’ān* 2:184, pg. 80.

¹⁵⁴ *Qur’ān* 2:184c, pg. 81.

¹⁵⁵ Bediuzzman Saïd Nursi, *The Rays: Reflections on Islamic Belief, Thought, Worship and Action*. Trans by Hüseyin Akarsu (New Jersey: Tughra books, 2010), 339.

¹⁵⁶ Vincent J. Cornell, “Fruit of the Tree of Knowledge: The Relationship Between Faith and Practice in Islam,” in *The Oxford History of Islam*, Ed. John L. Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 102.

¹⁵⁷ Zarabozo, *Purification of the Soul: Concept, Process and Means*, 352.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 350.

¹⁵⁹ Cornell, “Fruit of the Tree of Knowledge: The Relationship Between Faith and Practice in Islam,” in *The Oxford History of Islam*, Ed. John L. Esposito, 102.

willing to please Allāh alone and his ultimate loyalty is to Allāh- no matter what sacrifice that loyalty might entail.”¹⁶⁰ When a person gets to the place of seeking God through suffering motivated only by a pure love for God, then nothing else matters, including life or death, for this is truest sense of jihad.¹⁶¹

Possible Connections between Yom Kippur, Lent and Ramadan for Future Conversation

In light of the encounter of these three monotheistic worship practices some possible connections will be explored, specifically on how Jewish and Islamic worship may offers insights and challenges to Christian worship.

First, fasting hopes to reunite persons to God. The fasts disrupt the homeostasis of idolatry and bodily indulgences that neglect and at worst exploit the marginalized. It is curious that both Jewish and Islamic traditions prescribe fasting of food, drink, and sex, while Lent typically allows persons to “choose” what will be fasted. Also noteworthy is how both the Christian and Islamic fasts are not simply about abstaining, but about taking more time for prayer and reading from their holy books and compassion to others. It is also intriguing to note the similarity where Yom Kippur celebrates the giving of the Decalogue and Ramadan celebrates the revelation of *The Holy Qur’ān*. Fasting is connected to thanksgiving and remembrance of God’s revelation.

Similarly, such fasts are not about cognitive piety but seek transformation, not for a season, but a lifetime, to be more aware of the desperate need for God, and the despair of the marginalized in our neighborhoods. Also noteworthy is the importance of intention within the fasting for both Lent and Ramadan. Rituals performed only as legalistic duty do well in entirely missing the point. These fasts bodily awaken us to the groans of those who are forced to fast, on account of our gluttony. Teshuvah, Ramadan, and Lent move the people to repentance of indulgence, while inviting them into a new solidarity and alleviation of the despair of the marginalized. However, it is also noteworthy that intention alone is not initially necessary for *teshuvah*. While important, *kavannah*, is thought to occur through the habitual practice. While not found explicitly, it is likely that both Christian and Islamic worship would also encourage persons to fast in order to foster the fullness of intention. It is also noteworthy that such fasting is to be done to foster unity in one’s faith and can only be learned by following the example of others. While each person is charged for responsibility of their own discipline, this journey is not an isolated pilgrimage, but is fostered and is learned in community.

Teshuvah and Ramadan may also invite the Christian tradition to remember that Lent is not about masochism. As each night in Ramadan leads to communal revelry, Lent is a season to encounter the good news of life with new possibilities found in Christ. While Lent is appropriately a time of mourning sin, what is often lost is the other foci of Lent, celebrating the new opportunities of reconciliation in Christ. Teshuvah and Ramadan can also call the Christian tradition through the Lenten disciplines to see that such rhythms of communal fasting can unite the Church more closely together as the body of Christ. Similarly, both Teshuvah and Ramadan appear to be more explicit that such fasting seeks to not only come alongside the marginalized, but seek the transformation of the entire world. Such a vision should also become more central to the narrative of Lent.

As each night in Ramadan moves the Muslim community to remember the *Lay-lat al-qadr*-- “night of destiny,” such remembrance seems to have both an anamnetic and eschatological aroma. It appears more than sentimentality, but a new encounter of the divine and human intimacy, perhaps a type of theosis. Similarly Yom Kippur offers a vision for the World-to-Come that is to come.

¹⁶⁰ Zarabozo, *Purification of the Soul: Concept, Process and Means*, 352.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 273.

Finally, Sanctification as jihad: The dominant image of submission in all three faiths has been used for economic, gender, and racist exploitation, chauvinism, and bigotry. Yet an image of submission to God and one another as doxological surrender can help in the exorcism of the demon of individualistic Christianity. Curiously, the season of Ramadan enables a spirit of unity that seeks non-violence. Moreover, the first pillar of the Muslim faith, *the Shahadah*, demands and invites persons to holiness of desire and imagination. Allāh should be sought and desired above all else. Allāh alone is worthy of our worship. Allāh truly captures our gaze, which then moves us to be captured by the gaze of the outsider, alien, and marginalized. Is the Christian search for God a type of jihad, a pursuit and passion that captures our gaze with an intensity that refuses to let go?¹⁶² Perhaps Wesleyans can reimagine sanctification as a kind of jihad, where God alone is desired and worshipped. Ramadan and the other pillars also seem to affirm the Eucharistic notion of sacrifice which is the embodiment of sanctification. All that is done is done in worship so the people bear witness to Allāh as the one and only God.

Franz Rosenzweig suggests that the Jewish celebration of the transformation of the world through ritual prayers have important connections and appreciation in Christian liturgy. Kepnes further suggests, “I believe, one of the challenges of contemporary Jewish philosophies of liturgy is to recognize the power of Islamic liturgies too. For the dawn of the messianic era and the meaning of monotheistic Messianism will be more clearly seen when Jews, Christians, and Muslims work together for the redemption of the world.”¹⁶³ May it be so.

¹⁶² I am wondering about the possible connection to the work of Jewish Philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas.

¹⁶³ Kepnes, 77.

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