

# Yom Kippur

## Secular Humanistic Ceremony



adapted for the I.L. Peretz Secular Jewish Community from the  
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**I.L. Peretz Secular Jewish Community**

## BRIEF KOL NIDRE CEREMONY

### **Leader:**

We will begin with Kol Nidre. Through the words and the melody of Kol Nidre, the Jew expressed his deepest feelings and emotions. Its melodic line, majestic and yet plaintive, has continuously fascinated composers of modern time, Jews and Gentiles alike.

Beethoven, for instance, introduced the theme into one of his last great quartets.

Max Bruch, rather ornately, adapted it for the cello with orchestral accompaniment.

Leo Tolstoy was deeply affected by the Kol Nidre music. He described it as the saddest, yet most uplifting, of all melodies he knew, and "one that echoes the story of the great martyrdom of a grief-stricken nation."

Moses Maimonides said: "Since the power of doing good or evil is in our own hands, and since all the wicked deeds which we have committed have been committed with our full consciousness, it benefits us to turn in penitence and to forsake our evil deeds; the power of doing so being still in our hands."

### **Kol Nidre**

#### **Reader:**

All personal vows we may make,  
All personal oaths and pledges we may take  
Between this Yom Kippur and the Yom  
Kippur to come,  
We publicly renounce.

#### **Reader:**

May they all be relinquished and abandoned,  
Null and void, neither firm nor established.  
Let our personal vows, pledges and oaths  
Be considered neither vows nor pledges nor  
oaths.

#### **Reader:**

Kol Nidre is a chant of self-forgiveness.

#### **Reader:**

No taskmaster is as strict as our conscience.  
We exhaust ourselves in defense against the  
tyranny of self accusation.

#### **Reader:**

We are responsible for ourselves,  
for each other, and for the world we live in.

#### **Community:**

Yet we corrupt the earth and devour the land.  
We have despoiled Eden.  
The flowers fade and the birds are silent.

#### **Reader:**

How valiant we are, how glorious our deeds.

#### **Community:**

Yet we find poverty in the midst of wealth,  
injustice in the shadow of privilege.

#### **Reader:**

Great is the work of humanity.  
Great our cities and nations.

#### **Community:**

And yet the dead on distant battlefields do  
not speak of glory.

#### **Reader:**

We are powerful.  
We rule earth and space.  
But we look upon our works with sorrow.

#### **Reader:**

We acknowledge our imperfections.  
Although we aim toward lofty heights,  
temptation binds us to earth.  
Greed and vanity blind our eyes, envy and  
arrogance control our thoughts,  
false ambition too often determines our path.

**Community:**

Let us learn from the errors of yesterday in order to fulfill the tasks of tomorrow.

**Reader:**

Kol Nidre--chant of ages,  
Chant of Israel, chant of sorrow,  
Chant of human imperfection  
Measuring the throbbing heart beats  
Of a people bowed in anguish,  
Who in far and diverse lands  
Poured their souls into their music.

**Reader:**

We can hear the lamentations,  
We can see revealed before us  
Heroes, martyrs, saints, and scholars.  
Through the plaintive chant of Kol Nidre,  
Weaves a song of understanding,  
Lies the dawn of peace and freedom,  
When all hearts are purged of hatred  
And all people stand together.

**Reader:**

Kol Nidre is concerned with the importance of vows, oaths, and promises of human behavior. In the fifth chapter of Ecclesiastes, the author says, "It is better not to vow at all than to vow and not fulfill."

**Reader:**

But our forebears understood the need for escape clauses in human intentions. For despite good intentions, all of us make promises we cannot keep.

**Community:**

How many of us have fulfilled all that we have vowed? Who among us has not broken a heartfelt promise?

**Leader:**

Therefore, let us say together:

**Community:**

I hereby forgive those who have hurt me,  
Whether deliberately or by accident.  
As I forgive and pardon fully those who have wronged me, may those whom I have harmed in any way also forgive and pardon me. And may I not willfully repeat the wrongs I have committed in the past.  
May tolerance and justice light our days.  
May tolerance and justice light the world.

## YOM KIPPUR SERVICE

### **Leader:**

On this day of Yom Kippur we come together-- friends, families, neighbors --united by a common need and a common bond. Our need at this season is to renew our lives-- to go forward into the new year stronger, wiser, kinder than we were before. Our bond is the kinship of our shared humanity and our common love for Judaism and our Jewish community.

### **Reader:**

On this day, it is fitting to honor the thousands of years of history Jews have shared, as we observe an ancient and sacred tradition in a new and special way. Tradition imbues us this day with an atmosphere of dread and foreboding. We choose to temper that mood with the warmth and beauty that are also intrinsic to the history of our people.

### **Leader:**

If this is a day of remembrance, it is also a day of renewal.  
If this is a time for atonement, it is also a time for hope.  
If this is the season to assess our worth as individuals, it is also appropriate at this season to reaffirm our kinship with the international Jewish family.

### **Song:** HEVEYNU SHALOM ALEICHEM

He-vey-nu shalom aleichem  
He-vey-nu shalom aleichem  
He-vey-nu shalom aleichem  
He-vey-nu shalom, shalom, shalom aleichem

May we greet each other with peace and good will.

### **Shofar:** T'KEEYA! T'KEEYA! T'KEEYA

### **Leader:**

The sound of the ram's horn is sharp and clear. It pierces the armor of the heart.

### **Community:**

May our hearts and minds be open to what this day asks of us.  
May we be prepared to listen, with our minds and our hearts, and to raise our voices with those of Jews throughout the world.

### **Reader:**

This week, wherever there are Jews, there echoes the sound of the Shofar. Where it is heard in our hearts, quiet moments are pulled out of busy days. Where it is heard in our mind, it calls us to pay attention--to return to ourselves, to slow down, to turn inward.

### **Reader:**

Today we are concerned with reflection, re-evaluation and change. This tradition originates in the legend of the Book of Life. The legend tells us that on Rosh Hashana, the destiny of each person for the year to come is inscribed by an angel in the Book of Life. During the following days, the book stays open as people reflect and reconsider their lives.

### **Reader:**

For those who succeed in communicating with their inner selves, and who resolve to relate that new understanding to their behavior, the Angel might reconsider and change the writing in the book. But when the Shofar sounds on the day of Yom Kippur, the legend says, the Book of Life is sealed for the year to come.

**Reader:**

Each time the Shofar sounds today, let us breathe deeply of the spirit of our coming together, and of the spirit of the Day of Atonement, a day to look inward.

**Shofar:** T'KEEYA! SHEVOREEM!  
T'RUAH! T'KEEYA!

**CANDLE LIGHTING****Reader:**

How wonderful is the glory of Yom Kippur.

**Reader:**

We praise the beauty of the world.

**Reader:**

How radiant is the glory of humankind.

**Reader:**

How beautiful is the glory of life.

**Community:**

Light is sown for the righteous  
and gladness for the upright in heart.

**Reader:**

We celebrate the light. It burns for us.

**Community:**

It burns for us. It shines for the hope in our hearts.  
May it help us find our way in the year to come.

**Leader:**

The meaning of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur are deeply intertwined.  
The most important message for us as secular humanistic Jews, is that these days were chosen to call us to a deeper consciousness.

**Reader:**

On the days between, we see ourselves from a place outside our usual vantage point--

stripped of the external trappings of our lives. We attempt to see ourselves as we really are, where we really stand.

The days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur are called Yom-eem No-ra-eem, the days of awe.

**Reader:**

The Days of Awe have given strength and energy to our people's sense of justice-- to our sense of right action-- so that the Jewish value of *mentshlikhkite* is deeply felt.

Jewish ethics were created by the passionate consciousness of human will.

**Reader:**

The Book of Leviticus specifies:

"The tenth day of the seventh month is the Day of Atonement...

on which expiation is made on your behalf before the Lord.

It shall be a Shabbat of complete rest to you, and you shall practice self-denial; on the tenth day of the month at evening, from dusk to dusk, you shall observe this your Shabbat."

**Leader:**

The principles of atonement and renewal are essential to our lives, our consciousness.

They are part of our existence.

Those who take pride in freeing themselves--trying to understand their deepest needs,

striving to create their own lives--stand in awe of these days.

**Community:**

In my history and my future;  
in what I have become and what is yet to grow;  
in what I have done and what is left undone;  
in what I have learned and what I still must

learn;  
in awe of these, I say, "I am."

**Leader:**

The starting place is within.  
While there is time, before the final Shofar  
blast on Yom Kippur,  
tradition tells us we can change our  
destinies.

**Reader:**

For introspection, the starting place is within.  
The Hebrew word t'shuvah means return.  
The call to t'shuvah implies a return to our  
selves,  
to examine the reality of who we  
are--spiritually as well as intellectually.  
Introspection and return can give us the  
vision to see the changes  
we must make in order to survive.  
T'shuvah calls us to reflection and insight.

**Community:**

This is our time to pause and reflect.

**Reader:**

For honesty, the starting place is within.  
We know there is a world and a universe  
outside our reach.  
All that we can control is within ourselves.  
We can commit ourselves to knowing who  
we are,  
and to honest evaluation of what we can do.

**Community:**

This is a time to look honestly at our values  
and our behavior.

**Reader:**

For rededication, the starting place is within.  
We know that time moves us all, whether we  
will it or not.  
We know that conditions change, whether  
we wish to hold them or let them go.  
We know that things happen, whether we

seek them or try to avoid them.  
What we can determine, in knowing  
ourselves, is how we are going to change,  
and who we will become.

**Community:**

This is our time to plan for change.

**Reader:**

Whatever does not change grows stagnant.  
Whatever does not change becomes its own  
past, without a future.

**Community:**

Those who change without choosing are  
servants to the whims of time.  
This is our time to make choices.

**Leader:**

Let us then choose our future wisely.  
In the words of Hillel:

If I'm not for myself, who will be for me?  
If I'm for myself only, what am I?  
If not now, when?

**Community Sharing**

**Reader:**

Yom Kippur is a day to assert the unity of  
the human race.  
Human values cannot be displayed in solitude.  
The guiding principles of our lives acquire  
meaning only as a part of human  
relationships.

**Reader:**

Every individual has several identities.  
There is a sense of self that makes each one  
of us unique;  
a family identity that recognizes childhood  
and the people who nurture us;  
a Jewish identity that provides us with roots  
and a place in history.

**Reader:**

We also share a human identity that confirms our importance in the chain of life, and links us with all other people of the earth.

**Leader:**

Our human identity is primary. In the end, human differences are far fewer than our similarities. Throughout the ages, human behavior and aspirations have been a remarkably consistent expression of universal needs. If we find our similarities uncomfortable, at least they tell us we are not alone. Each of us is far more than an individual. Each of us is a part of the human family. As individuals our lives are brief, but as members of humanity our story stretches into the past and reaches toward the future.

**Leader:**

Yom Kippur is a day to celebrate the kinship of the Jewish people-- in all times and in all corners of the earth.

**Reader:**

We are one with the Jews who seek peace and beauty through an ancient faith and an ancient way of life. We may not join them in their convictions, but we can respect their dedication to a Jewish ideal.

**Reader:**

We are one with the Jews who know their heritage only because of a Jewish name, a smattering of Yiddish, an ethnic identity, and a longing for community at this time of year. We understand their need and welcome them into our family.

**Reader:**

We are one with the people of Israel who build and seek to preserve one small Jewish

haven.

And we are one with those who work toward peace between Israel and its neighbors.

**Reader:**

We are one with the young parents who sing a Yiddish lullaby handed down through generations, singing to their children in many lands, sharing the gentle words and the old melody. We share their instinctive need to pass along the beauty of their heritage.

**Song: OYFN PRIPETSHIK**

Oyfn pripetshik brent a fayerl  
Un in shtub iz heys,  
Un der rebbe lernt kleyne kinderlach  
Dem aleph-beys,  
Un der rebbe lernt kleyne kinderlach  
Dem aleph-beys.

Gedenktzhe kinderlach, gedenktzhe  
tayere,  
Vos ir lernt do.  
Zogt zhe nokh amol  
Un take nokh amol  
Kometz aleph o.  
Zogt zhe nokh amol  
Un take nokh amol  
Kometz aleph o.

**Community:**

As Jews, we are part of an international family, linking past and future in an eternal present.

**Leader:**

In some communities, during the Middle Ages, there were Jews whose conduct had placed them beyond the pale. They may have been informers, heretics or criminals. On Yom Kippur, however, they stole into a corner of the synagogue to join their people at worship. The rabbis let them stay because, no matter

what their sins, they were still considered Jews.

**Community:**

The Talmud says, "Do not condemn your neighbors.

You do not know what you would have done in their place."

**Reader:**

The Talmud says, "Condemn no one and consider nothing impossible, for there is no one without a future, and nothing that does not have its hour."

**Reader:**

Bible stories do not tell only of heroes. The patriarch Jacob deceived his father and betrayed his brother. To protect himself, Abraham gave Sarah, his beloved wife, to Pharaoh. King Saul tried to kill the young David. David the king murdered another out of passion.

**Reader:**

Yom Kippur is a practical reminder of human fallibility. Recognizing our limitations, we learn compassion for others who fail. In our own humility lies the source of our bonds with all people, and in those bonds we find our strength.

**Reader:**

Yom Kippur is the traditional day of confession. The harm we do others is but a reflection of the hurt we inflict upon ourselves.

**Reader:**

Yom Kippur is a day of reassessment. We accept our limitations, renew our commitments and reassert the principles we hold dear.

**Leader:**

We affirm the bonds that unite us all as brothers and sisters in need of forgiveness. Let us say together:

**Community:**

I hereby forgive whoever has hurt me,  
Whoever has done me any wrong,  
Whether deliberately or by accident,  
Whether by word or deed.  
May no one be guilty on my account.

And as I forgive and pardon fully  
Whoever has done me wrong,  
I shall seek out those I have harmed  
And ask for their forgiveness,  
Whether I acted deliberately or by accident,  
Whether by word or deed.

**Al Cheyt - For Our Mistakes or Sins**

**Leader:**

On the Jewish High Holidays we take collective responsibility for our own lives and for the activities of the community and society of which we are a part. We affirm our fundamental interdependence and inter-connectedness. We have allowed others to be victims of incredible suffering, have turned our backs on others and their well-being, and yet today we acknowledge that this world is co-created by all of us, and so we atone for all of it. While the struggle to change ourselves and our world may be long and painful, it is our struggle; no one else can do it for us. To the extent that we have failed to do all that we could to make ourselves or our community all that we ought to be, we ask each other for forgiveness—and we now commit ourselves to transformation this coming year.



Let us go around the room, slowing reading each of the Mistakes or Sins of the traditional Al Cheyt.

**Reader:**

For the mistakes we committed under duress and willingly.

**Reader:**

For the mistakes we committed through having a hard heart.

**Reader:**

For the mistakes we committed without thinking (or without knowledge).

**Reader:**

For the mistakes we committed through things we blurted out with our lips.

**Reader:**

For the mistake we committed in public and in private.

**Reader:**

For the mistakes we committed through immorality.

**Reader:**

For the mistakes we committed through harsh speech.

**Reader:**

For the mistakes we committed with knowledge and deceit.

**Reader:**

For the mistakes we committed through inner thoughts.

**Reader:**

For the mistakes we committed through wronging a friend.

**Reader:**

For the mistakes we committed through insincere confession.

**Reader:**

For the mistakes we committed while gathering to do negative things.

**Reader:**

For the mistakes we committed willfully and unintentionally.

**Reader:**

For the mistakes we committed by degrading parents and teachers.

**Reader:**

For the mistakes we committed by exercising power.

**Reader:**

For the mistakes we committed with foolish speech.

**Reader:**

For the mistakes we committed with vulgar speech.

**Reader:**

For the mistakes we committed with the Yetzer Hara (evil inclination).

**Reader:**

For the mistakes we committed against those who know, and those that do not know.

**Reader:**

For the mistakes we committed through bribery.

**Reader:**

For the mistakes we committed through denial and false promises.

**Reader:**

For the mistakes we committed through negative speech (Loshon Hara).

**Reader:**

For the mistakes we committed through being scornful (or scoffing).

**Reader:**

For the mistakes we committed in business.

**Reader:**

For the mistakes we committed with food and drink.

**Reader:**

For the mistakes we committed through interest and extortion.

**Reader:**

For the mistakes we committed by being arrogant.

**Reader:**

For the mistakes we committed with eye movements.

**Reader:**

For the mistakes we committed with endless babbling.

**Reader:**

For the mistakes we committed with haughty eyes.

**Reader:**

For the mistakes we committed with a strong forehead (brazenness).

**Reader:**

For the mistakes we committed in throwing off the yoke (refusing to accept responsibility).

**Reader:**

For the mistakes we committed in judgment.

**Reader:**

For the mistakes we committed in entrapping a friend.

**Reader:**

For the mistakes we committed through jealousy (a begrudging eye).

**Reader:**

For the mistakes we committed through light-headedness.

**Reader:**

For the mistakes we committed by being stiff-necked.

**Reader:**

For the mistakes we committed by running to do evil.

**Reader:**

For the mistakes we committed by telling people what others said about them.

**Reader:**

For the mistakes we committed through vain oath taking.

**Reader:**

For the mistakes we committed through baseless hatred.

**Reader:**

For the mistakes we committed in extending the hand.

**Reader:**

For the mistakes we committed through confusion of the heart.

**Reader:**

For the mistakes we committed by making excuses for Arab terror and blaming Israel for the sins of others.

**Reader:**

For the mistakes we committed by encouraging hatred, ignoring the pain of the Palestinians, and compromising our most fundamental values as Jews.

**MEMORIAL SERVICE****Leader:**

Yom Kippur is a day of memory.  
We stand together with the men and women of centuries past,  
whose blood pulses in our veins, whose lives are the foundation of our culture.

**Reader:**

Death cannot deny a form of human immortality.  
Everyone leaves a mark upon this world,  
touching the lives of those they leave behind.

**Reader:**

People live on in deeds beyond memory.  
Hanna Senesh, who committed her short life to saving other Jews from the Nazi death machine,  
wrote these words in the darkest moments of Jewish history:

**Reader:**

"There are stars whose radiance is visible on earth although they are extinct.  
There are people whose brilliance continues to light the world  
though they are no longer among the living.  
Those lights are particularly bright when the night is dark.  
They light the way."  
Hannah Senesh is herself such a light.

**Leader:**

Among life's blessing's, none is more precious than love of family and friends.  
The strength and compassion of parents, the loyalty of brothers and sisters,  
the affection of children, the understanding of close friends,  
these strands weave the basic fabric of human happiness.

**Reader:**

When someone we love passes away, a part of our being also dies.  
But the memory of those we love lives on long after their physical departure.  
Beyond the power of death, they sustain and inspire us.

**Leader:**

In an age of universal turmoil and threat of calamity,  
may we remember the courage of our forebears in their hours of trial,  
to hearten us in our struggles.

**Reader:**

We recall the martyrs of Israel in the days of the Roman Empire,  
the innocents sacrificed in the name of God by the crusaders.

**Reader:**

We remember the wandering Jews of Europe--driven by the Inquisition from Spain,  
by the pogroms from Poland and Russia, by superstition and ignorance,  
from one temporary haven to another.

**Reader:**

We will never forget, nor let the world forget, the Jews of Europe in our own time,  
our brothers and sisters, our parents and our children,  
victims of a holocaust of hatred and inhumanity.

**Leader:**

Let us all stand for the singing of the partisan anthem.

**Song: ZOG NIT KEYNMOL**

Zog nit keyn-mol az du geyst dem lets-tn veg  
 Khotsh him-len blay-e-ne far-shte-ln bloy-e teg;  
 Vayl ku-men vet nokh und-zer oys-ge  
 benkt-te sho,  
 S'vet a poyk ton und-zer trot: mir zaynen do!  
 Vayl ku-men vet nokh und-zer oys-ge  
 benkt-te sho,  
 S'vet a poyk ton und-zer trot: mir zaynen do!

Never say that there is only death for you,  
 Though leaden skies may be concealing days  
 of blue.  
 Because the hour we have hungered for is  
 near;  
 Beneath our tread the earth shall tremble: we  
 are here!  
 Because the hour we have hungered for is  
 near;  
 Beneath our tread the earth shall tremble: we  
 are here!

*All are seated*

**Community:**

We have the gift of remembrance.  
 We will transmit the story of our people  
 from generation to generation.

**Reader:**

Though their tongues are silent, our  
 forebears speak with our voices.  
 Though their hands are still, they live  
 through us.

**Community:**

Our forebears live on in us.

**Reader:**

We eat the fruit of trees planted by men and

women long gone from the earth.  
 Through skills and devices conceived by  
 vanished generations,  
 we mold nature and shape our lives.

**Community:**

The work of the earth and its people live in  
 us.

**Reader:**

The visions of people who died before we  
 were born  
 are immortalized in our music and art.  
 The wisdom of the ancients still speaks in  
 our literature.  
 The works of men and women of old  
 are recorded in our histories and reflected in  
 our society.

**Community:**

The spirits of ages past lives in our culture.

**Reader:**

The past lives on in our reason, in our works,  
 in our creativity,  
 and in our feelings for one another.

**Community:**

The past lives on in our minds, our spirit and  
 our hearts.

**Reader:**

As we remember those who have passed  
 from our lives,  
 we reaffirm the value of our common  
 humanity.  
 We renew our conviction that life continues,  
 has value and meaning.

**Community:**

Each time I remember a loved one who has  
 died,  
 each time I mourn the victims of holocausts  
 past and present,

I reaffirm my determination to hold fast to life and to protect it.

**Leader:**

In the rising of the sun and in its going down, we remember them.

**Community:**

In the blowing of the wind and in the chill of winter, we remember them.

**Leader:**

In the opening buds and in the rebirth of spring, we remember them.

**Community:**

In the blueness of the sky and in the warmth of summer, we remember them.

**Leader:**

In the rustling of leaves and in the beauty of autumn, we remember them.

**Community:**

In the beginning of the year and when it ends, we remember them.

**Leader:**

When we are weary and in need of strength, we remember them.

**Community:**

When we are lost and sick at heart, we remember them.

**Leader:**

When we have joys we yearn to share, we remember them.

**Community:**

So long as we live, they too shall live, for they are now a part of us, as we remember them.

If I live for myself alone,  
I am destroyed by death.  
But if I live for the good of humanity,  
I survive my own decay  
To become part of the human dream.

**Leader:**

The world is sustained by the just men and women in it.

The light of justice and mercy has been passed on to us.

Let us pass the flame of truth and compassion on to each other,  
to our children, to the peoples of the world.  
Thus we redeem the covenant of our people--  
to serve as a beacon of justice and mercy to the nations.

**Community:**

May the memories of those we loved in life,  
and still love in death,  
bless our thoughts and actions today and in the years to come.

May the special grace of their years  
reach out to touch our hearts and inspire our deeds.

**COMMUNITY MEMORIAL**

**Leader:**

At this time, let us honor the memories of our loved ones.

*Please stand.*

Let go around so that you may each say the names of those you wish to remember on this day.

*After the names are said*

Let us take a moment for silent meditation.

*Please be seated*

**Leader:**

It is Yom Kippur, a time to harvest human hope.

We cannot afford to waste this sacred day in regretting the mistakes of the past.

We must instead begin the task of designing a brighter tomorrow.

**Reader:**

If we are wise, we recognize the proper function of conscience is to help in planning for a better future.

**Reader:**

We must forgive ourselves and others the sins of yesterday, to clear the pages for tomorrow's good.

**Reader:**

As the summer fades, we sense a quickening of spirit, a new energy in the autumn air. We stretch our minds and find it good to live. The world is an open promise, both kind and cruel.

**Reader:**

We can endure the cruelty of life, because we have also seen its beauty and its love. We can withstand its harshness in order to live its moments of perfection.

**Community:**

In this new year, let us strive to be honest with ourselves and with others.

**Reader:**

Sure of our own worth, reaching to live up to our highest ideals.

**Reader:**

Ruled by reason, yet open to warmth and spontaneity.

**Reader:**

Caring members of the human race and the ancient family of Judaism.

**Reader:**

Reaching out to others, finding joy and strength within ourselves.

**Leader:**

Treasuring the potential and the reality of each day that passes.

**Community:**

"Teach us to number our days, that we may get us a heart of wisdom."

**Leader:**

The voices of Yom Kippur will soon be silent. From this place we will return to our homes to seek peace, alone or in the company of our friends and families.

**Community:**

May the honesty, the courage, and the love we have sought here help us approach the future comforted by our meditations on these days of awe.

**Song: SHALOM CHAVEREEM**

Sha-lom Cha-ve-reem, sha-lom Cha-ve-reem,  
Sha-lom, Shalom,  
La-heet ra-ah-oht, la-heet ra-ah-oht,  
Sha-lom, Shalom.

**Leader:**

Shalom.  
Peace and goodbye until we meet again.

**Shofar: FINAL BLAST**