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## Musings from a Biased Jew

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# Musings from a Biased Jew

## **Abstract**

Saturday was [Yom Kippur](#), the day we as Jews repent for our sins. During the holiday, we fast to afflict our souls, to provoke in ourselves to confess and obtain pardon. As I sat in [Hillel's](#) morning services, I reflected on the ways I have intentionally or unintentionally harmed others. [*excerpt*]

## **Keywords**

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, Yom Kippur, Hillel, preconceptions

## **Disciplines**

Civic and Community Engagement | Jewish Studies | Politics and Social Change

## **Comments**

Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](#) where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at [surgegettysburg.wordpress.com](https://surgegettysburg.wordpress.com) Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that –isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

# SURGE

[ VERB ] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

## MUSINGS FROM A BIASED JEW

October 8, 2014



Saturday was [Yom Kippur](#), the day we as Jews repent for our sins. During the holiday, we fast to afflict our souls, to provoke in ourselves to confess and obtain pardon. As I sat in [Hillel's](#) morning services, I reflected on the ways I have intentionally or unintentionally harmed others.

*I assumed he grew up in a poor neighborhood.*

*I was visibly shocked when she was a foot taller than him.*

*I knew she shouldn't have gone with him, but I didn't say anything.*

*I walked by him, thinking he was probably an irresponsible drug addict.*

Yom Kippur holds us responsible for our actions and reminds us that love and forgiveness are paramount. But, we can't just apologize and move on, waiting to do the same thing next year.

We need to take on this daunting and difficult task on a regular basis because, by admitting that we have behaved with bias, that we have committed micro-aggressions, that we have acted as a bystander, we are able to check our behavior and our subconscious conditioning.

*Why did I think that a woman shouldn't be taller than her husband? Why did I assume students of color on our campus are coming from low-income families? Why was I afraid to speak out? Why did I think he was on the streets because he was irresponsible?*

By asking myself these tough question and forcing myself to explore the roots of my assumptions, I am in a better place to challenge myself to act more fairly and to treat others with more respect. The next time I go on a [DC Outfitters trip](#), it will be this confession that will remind me that my preconceptions as just that,

enabling me to approach people with a smile, a more open mind and a genuine desire to listen and understand. Next time I'm concerned about a friend, I can take the courageous step to tell her instead of prioritizing my fear of being intrusive over her safety. Next time I meet a new person and potential friend, I can check my racial bias at the door. That creates some powerful change at a personal level.

But, as Jews, we don't repent alone. Yom Kippur is a communal event. We collectively recite the words "forgive us, pardon us, grant us atonement." The "us", the collective we, is where we take a step further. We admit that we are responsible not just for our own sins, but also for the sins of one another. We pray as a collective people in order to take responsibility for not just our personal missteps, but for allowing injustice in our society. As [Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel](#) famously said, "some are guilty, but all are responsible."

As I came back together with friends at the end of Yom Kippur to break the fast, I thought about how good it felt to unite as a "[small but mighty](#)" Jewish community. There is strength in community – we can leverage that [support](#) for action.

We can use the idea of communal repentance to take a stronger step towards societal change. If I, as an individual, can change my actions after admitting and understanding my bias, could we create more systemic change when a group of people admit and seek atonement for mistakes?

We come together all the time in protest – rallying around climate change, racial injustice, gender bias. Collective outrage and action creates change; could collective admission of guilt do the same, possibly with more vigor?

What might happen if the majority of students at Gettysburg College came together to individually and collectively state examples that demonstrate their role in the perpetuation of [rape culture](#) on our campus? How about the ways we encourage [heteronormativity](#) or [white dominance](#)?

This possibility brings me hope for this [new year](#). L'shana Tova.

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