I had the good fortune to daven at K’hal Adath Jeshurun (KAJ – ‘Breuer’s’) this past Yom Kippur (2013); since that time I have debated if I should put my experience in writing. An article in a local publication convinced me that sharing this experience may be worthwhile. Although when it comes to minhagim I personally follow Rav Binyomin Shlomo Hamburger of Machon Moreshes Ashkenaz (MMA- www.moreshesashkenaz.org), the differences between KAJ and MMA are minimal and generally nothing to be uptight over.

Being of German-Jewish descent and involved with MMA, I have wanted to attend KAJ for Yom Kippur for many years and when the opportunity arose I was about as excited for Yom Kippur as one can be.

As in a typical schul, the paroches, shulchan and sifrei Torah were covered in white. In addition to these characteristic features, the inside of the aron was also covered in white, as was the platform (duchan) in front of the aron and the steps leading up to the platform. Every shtender was covered with a white cloth that says l’shana Tovah. This sets the tone for a very royal configuration.

Supplementing this, most congregants (men, women and children) were dressed in white. For men, this minimally includes a white yarmulke (or kaepchen – a type of yarmulke that is larger than a contemporary yarmulke but smaller than the old Rabbinic yarmulkes) and tie. In addition, married men also wear a kittel (or sargenes – a type of kittel which is closed all around and is pulled over the head in the same manner as one would put on a T-Shirt) and a white-on-white tallis. Single men and boys wear their regular black striped tallis. Although the general rule in KAJ is that only the Rabbanim cover their heads with their talleisim, on Yomim Noraim this rule is relaxed. Some individuals cover their heads at various times while others do not. Hats are not worn in schul during these days.

Since KAJ follows the old Ashkenaz messorah, teffilas Zakkah, a prayer instituted by the “Chayei Adam” (Rabbi Avraham Danzig, 1748–1820) is not officially recited (although one can certainly come earlier and say it). The prayers of Shema Koleinu (until Amareinu Ha’azinu) and Unesaneh Tokef are similarly not recited. The piyut (liturgical poem) Unesaneh Tokef was instituted for Rosh Hashanah and was never accepted among German Jewry for Yom Kippur.
Before Kol Nidrei, the congregation did not don their tallaisim until the Rav and Chazzan recited the blessing on their tallaisim aloud; the congregation followed suit quietly. A similar procedure was followed before Baruch Sheomar in the morning.

The piyutim are generally recited according to the intention of the paytan and not according to the manner they are written in many machzorim. Portions set aside for the chazzan are recited aloud exclusively by him; those portions set aside for the congregation to respond with are said aloud exclusively by them. Many of the piyutim have their own melodies which sets the tone for the chazzan and tzibur for that particular piece.

Most melodies used in KAJ are, of course, of Western European origin, although many of the melodies are extremely old. It is possible that some are derivatives from the time of the second temple. In general, the tunes of German Jewry were composed to the words of a piyut as opposed to using a random popular song. At times, the congregation would sing along with the chazzan, although this was not the rule. In other schuls, when the shliach tzibbur reaches the end of a piyut or various parts of Shemone Esrei, the tzibur will briefly sing to fill in the pause. This does not exist in KAJ. Of course many of the tunes were foreign to me, as can be expected. Many of the kaddaishim have their own special tunes. The chazzanus at KAJ is generally not operatic as some might imagine; these are skilled ba’alei teffilah who adhere faithfully to the messorah during davening and keep the teffilah moving along.

Just about every piyut in the Machzor was recited, which of course takes time. Additionally, select selichos were recited at every teffilah, including Shacharis, Mussaf and Mincha. The selichos to be recited are chosen in advance; seven selichos are recited during each of these three teffilos. It is astounding that so few Ashkenazic congregations recite selichos as is done in KAJ (and elsewhere) which until about 200 years ago was fairly standard in Europe and still is among non-Ashkenazim. The theme of Yom Kippur is selicha and kapparah and is the day when the 13 Middos were first proclaimed – it is a shame to go through the day only reciting selichos during Maariv and Neilah. Due to this grueling schedule, from the time Shacharis begins on Yom Tov morning through Maariv on Motzaei Yom Tov, there is no break. I thought I would have a lot of trouble adjusting to a schul with no downtime, and I therefore made sure to take my own breaks during the day. This, and the fact that the Kehilla adheres to the printed schedule, allowed me to focus on the teffilah.

The Kohanim went to the duchan three times; Shacharis, Mussaf and Neilah. Each time they sang a different tune relating to a different part of teffilah. The songs used by the Kohanim were different than anything I have ever heard and the tunes were obviously complicated. The singing was extensive even though Yom Kippur was on
Shabbos. The tunes and effect of the *birchas kohanim* was particularly majestic and beautiful.

Unlike other *schuls*, the *Kohanim* do not leave *schul* to wash their hands. Two carts are situated toward the front of the *schul*, each equipped with a silver pitcher and basin. The *Kohanim* line up to have their hands washed.

The *Shacharis laining* was read with the *Yomim Noraim* tune which is almost identical to the one that is used in most Ashkenaz *schuls*. This is in contrast to *Maftir* which was chanted according to the ancient standard *trop* as practiced by German Jewry.

The Torah, which during the year is wrapped in one *wimpel*, is wrapped with two *wimpels* on all *Yomim Tovim*. (*A wimpel* is a cloth used at a baby’s *bris* which is later decorated and wrapped around the Torah instead of the modern *gartel*. It is then donated to the *schul*. *Chazal* refer to the *wimpel* as a *mitpachas*. The *mantel*, a later innovation, is placed over the *wimple*. *Wimpel* or *wimple* is pronounced [vimpel] in IPA /vɪmpəl/). The first *wimpel* was wrapped facing outward so one looking can see some of the words written on it. The second *wimpel* does not have any words on it. In KAJ, the *wimpels* are wrapped from the top down rather than the more common custom of wrapping the *wimpel* from the bottom of the Torah to the top.

During *Mussaf*, *kor'im* was done in a different manner than I was used to. The *tzibbur* recited the paragraph of *V'hakohanim v'ha'am* to themselves and everybody bowed upon reaching the appropriate words. The *Chazzan* then sang the entire paragraph *after* the congregation had completed their recitation. Before he began, two individuals approached the *amud* and pushed it away. These individuals then rolled out a white carpet in front of the *Chazzan*. The *Chazzan* (E. Lasdun) did not bow like many are used to seeing but rather, to the obvious delight of many, he performed a variation of *pishut raglayim*, while keeping his hands at his sides. During this time, he continued to sing, which is no doubt a difficult feat. This author does not know why full *pishut yadayim v'raglayim* is not performed.

At the end of each *tefillah*, the congregation called out, unanimously and in a loud voice, “*Yasher Koach!*”

At the end of *Nelilah*, the *shaimos* were recited differently than most congregations. The Rav recited *HaShem hu haElokim*, followed by the congregation. The Rav recited it the first time, followed by the congregation. This responsive recitation continued until the Rav and *tzibur* each recited the phrase seven times. *Shema Yisroel* was recited out loud one time by the Rav, followed by the congregation, and *baruch shaim* was said
quietly. This was immediately followed by *shofar* (one *tekiah*) and *v’hu rachum* for *Maariv*.

The choir in KAJ does not participate in the actual *tefillah* – ever, with the exception of *Hallel*. On Yom Kippur, the choir only sings after *Maariv* (*Yigdal* and *Adon olam*), and when the Torah is taken out and put away at *Shacharis* and *Mincha*. The choir adds to the majestic atmosphere of the *davening* and probably did not extend the service by more than a couple of minutes.

Even though it was Yom Kippur, people were friendly and welcoming.

Overall, the entire experience at KAJ had a different feel to it than your standard *schul* or *yeshiva*. In *yeshiva*, for example, the *davening* clearly centers around the idea of *viduy*. In KAJ, to this author at least, the *davening* reflected a certain kingliness, *malchus*, that is imbued with the ancient *messorah* of Ashkenaz. This was an experience that I hope to be able to participate in again.

*The author would like to thank Rabbi Yisroel Strauss for reviewing and commenting on this article.*

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