

Who Will Rest, and Who Will Wander: The Jewish Transient & Yom Kippur

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On Rosh Hashanah will be inscribed and on Yom Kippur will be sealed how many will pass from the earth and how many will be created; who will live and who will die; who will die at his predestined time and who before his time...

During this week leading up to **Yom Kippur**, many Jews will ponder the words of the High Holiday prayer *Unetanneh Tokef*, which promises that the **unique mitzvah** of giving tzedakah can improve one's prospects for the coming year.

...Who by water and who by fire, who by sword, who by beast, who by famine, who by thirst, who by upheaval, who by plague, who by strangling, and who by stoning....

As the weather turns colder here in New York, our thoughts may turn to **those who have no homes** to keep out the cold.

...Who will rest and who will wander, who will live in harmony and who will be harried, who will enjoy tranquility and who will suffer, who will be impoverished and who will be enriched, who will be degraded and who will be exalted.

This week, a special holiday J-Vault: *The Jewish Transient* (1932)

"Throughout our history," said Emma S. Schreiber at the National Conference of Jewish Social Service, "responsibility for the stranger has been one of the finest examples of the manifest actions of our social conscience." But Schreiber did not intend to flatter the Jewish community; instead, she painted a bleak picture of a terrible problem:

Jewish communities themselves, believe that [Jewish] transients turn to Jewish resources almost entirely. Seven of the 85 communities [in a nationwide study] reported free use of non-Jewish facilities, while the others felt that Jewish transients use them to a limited extent or not at all...

...Discussions with shelter caretakers, representatives of shelter groups, and individuals in the community clearly show that these groups despise the transient, even while they consider it essential to extend him shelter

service. The condition of the shelters is the best proof that this spirit exists. In a general way, the Jewish transient is certain of a minimum amount of care in the elementary necessities of food and shelter. In individual cases, the provision is generous. Usually, transients can expect from one to three nights' care and two or three meals a day, although practices vary greatly from place to place. But beyond these elementary provisions, the administration, in terms of sanitation, is below any acceptable community standard...

...All age groups are represented in the transient population, but the Jewish transient is more likely to be in the age group 20 to 30 and less likely to fall into the ages 60 and over... Seventy-nine and three tenths per cent were single men and only 9.5% reported no kinship ties. Almost half of the transients who claimed relatives reported parents as the nearest tie. The Jewish transient is not close to the immigrant period. Fifty-seven and six-tenths per cent were native born and even the foreign born had been in the country long enough to become citizens. Eighty-seven and five-tenths per cent were citizens and 8.4% had their first papers.

Interested? [*Download the entire publication.*](#)

But repentance (teshuvah), and prayer (tefillah), and charity (tzedakah) avert the severity of the decree!

Please consider a donation to one of the many organizations working to end homelessness. **The Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty** provides **housing for the homeless**, and of course there are many fine non-sectarian agencies, such as **Pathways to Housing** and **Project Renewal**. (Know of more? Please share them in the comments section.)

Gemar chatimah tovah.

