

# Kol Nidre: The Mystery of its Melody

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Two famous apostates, Heinrich Heine and Felix Mendelssohn, weeping at Kol Nidre's melody

## KOL NIDRE: THE MYSTERY OF ITS MELODY

Is there a Jew capable of withstanding the power of the Kol Nidre melody? Yet we do not know where and when the melody was composed. We haven't the slightest idea who composed the text of Kol Nidre. The words haven't any validity at all in Jewish law. They do not even have a logical explanation, though there have been many theories based on historical events that sound plausible. The words are prosaic, incomprehensible, yet thanks to the soul rending melody, the words too have become immortal. Our national soul is in the Kol Nidre melody. All our past generations live in it. Our entire history is expressed, our grief, our sorrows, our pride, our steadfast faith.

The poet Heinrich Heine, born a Jew, mocked humanity and scorned the world with his sharp satire and caustic wit. His humour did not fail him even in the final bedridden years of his life.

One Kol Nidre night, his dearest friend, the composer Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdi found Heine in a dark mood. Asked what was wrong, Heine replied: "Don't you know that this is Yom Kippur night and Kol Nidre is now being sung in the Synagogue? Please play Kol Nidre for me", Heine implored Mendelssohn-Bartholdi.

The composer played Kol Nidre on the piano, and the two men - both branches severed from the Jewish tree - wept. Ever-so-delicate Jewish strings concealed in a dusty corner of their hearts quivered. They emerged from their concealment to haunt the two Jewish souls which had been baptised Christian, with the strains of Kol Nidre. Such is the mystic power of Kol Nidre and its melody.