

- YEMEI RATZON -

# IDEAS & inspiration

THE NEW YEAR INSPIRED

## Essays

*Dedicated in memory of our beloved mother,  
Rose Siegel, Sarah Russa bat Raphael, and her  
beloved sister, Celia Firestein, Tzirel bat Raphael,  
of Baltimore, Maryland by Yitzchok and  
Barbara Lehmann Siegel and family*

Presented by:

THE  
*Women's*  
INITIATIVE

  
ORTHODOX  
UNION  
תורה ומצוות

**It is with great pleasure** that the OU Women's Initiative presents to you the transcribed Yemei Ratzon Tefillah Audio Series. This series is dedicated by Yitzchok and Barbara Lehmann Seigel and family in memory of their beloved mother, Rose Siegel, Sarah Russa bat Raphael, and her beloved sister, Celia Firestein, Tzirel bat Raphael, of Baltimore, Maryland. We are grateful for their generosity.

This time of year - from Rosh Chodesh Elul to Yom Kippur is known as the Yemei Ratzon - the Days of Seeking - days when we dedicate time to grow closer to Hashem in an effort to repent and return. Over the last month, we have explored the Yemei Ratzon Tefillot with our recognized educators and speakers, learning unique and inspiring ideas and insights. We received many requests asking to transcribe these inspiring presentations. These transcriptions are a result of this effort.

We hope that this booklet will enrich the davening experience and help to direct our prayers heavenward. We pray that investing in our Tefillot will give each of us renewed strength to approach the Almighty in a year when we so desperately need His benevolence and care. May He grant each of us a year filled with good health, happiness and holiness in a restored world.

Thank you to the Women's Initiative team, Adeena Mayerfeld, Eliana Sohn Cohen and Rachel Leff of the Communications team for all your hard work in putting this incredibly rich and meaningful program together.

Ketiva V'Chatima Tova,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Adina', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Rebbetzin Dr. Adina Shmidman

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# Introduction: The Addition of אֲרֵי וְיִשְׁעֵי לְדָוִד ה'

Rebbetzin Dr. Adina Shmidman

As we begin the quest toward repentance and connection to our spiritual selves, let us explore *Perek 27* - our spiritual map providing direction and structure for our journey through the Yemei Ratzon. The *perek* (chapter) has certain features that we will look at using a more broad strokes view and then zoom in to see the details more clearly. We are so familiar with this *perek*, saying it close to one hundred times from *Rosh Chodesh Elul* to Shemini Atzeres twice a day. So the route is familiar but if we pause and slow down, we aspire to find meaning on the journey and hope along the way.

The *perek* begins with the words אֲרֵי ה' אֲרֵי לְדָוִד ה' אֲרֵי. Dovid Hamelech describes Hashem as “my light and my salvation” and as the Tehillim reader - we sense a spirit of expressiveness, of connection with Hashem, a person who feels connected even in challenging times. In fact, the Midrash Vayikra Rabba shares that אֲרֵי alludes to Rosh Hashanah describing the light brought to the world with the creation of Man and וְיִשְׁעֵי refers to the salvation we find on Yom Kippur. Hashem is referred to in the third person, suggesting a sense of faith that Hashem is a constant, there, steady, protective - if I believe in Hashem, why would I be afraid?

One thing I ask of the L-rd, only that do I seek: to live in the house of the L-rd all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the L-rd, to frequent His temple.

אחת | שאלתי מאתה  
אותה | אבקש שבתי  
בביתך | כל ימי חיי  
לחיות | בנעםיה ולבקר  
בהיכלו:

The Malbim who never seems to let a repetitive phrase pass without comment says that a *she'eila* is an expressed request while a *bakashah* is an unspoken desire of the heart. These are in essence one request - אותה - I pray that I remain consistent and connected to Hashem. The word - ולבקר has the word *boker*, morning, as its root word. We ask to interact with Hashem with the vigor and vitality of morning. As an aside, it actually struck me that perhaps this is one perspective we should have on *bikur cholim* - to visit the sick to restore their vigor and vitality and give them a sense of dawn and a new day.

Back to our *perek* - suddenly, we meet another person – Dovid Hamelech is no longer the confident, energetic voice but rather we hear a fear - in *pasuk 7* (verse 7): כי יצפני | בסכה ביום. He will shelter me in His pavilion on an evil day, grant me the protection of His tent, raise me high upon a rock. Dovid Hamelech is now reaching out directly to Hashem using second person - do not leave me, do not reject me, protect me in your *succah* - כי יצפני | בסכה - another reference to this time of year. My mother and father have left me, there is only G-d to take me in.

Don't hide your face | אל תסתור פניך ממני אל-  
from me, don't push | תטשני ואל תעזבני אלקי  
me away. | ישעי:

When you look at *pesukim* 1-6, the tone seems entirely different than *pesukim* 7-13. There appears to be a different tone and a different stance. In fact, the narrator is seemingly a

different person and yet remarkably, words from the first half are echoed in the second half.

Rabbi Elchonon Samet points out that there is a common language and similarity of phrase when one compares the first half of the *perek* and the second half of the *perek*. I will point out two examples:

Example 1:

First half: Posuk 1

**The L-rd** is my  
Light and **my**  
**Salvation** [a  
fact]

ה' אורֵי וְיִשְׁעֵי

Second half: Posuk 9

Do not  
abandon me, **O**  
**G-d of my**  
**salvation** [a  
request]

וְאַל-תַּעֲזֹבֵנִי  
אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׁעֵי

Example 2:

First half: Posuk 4

One thing I ask  
of the L-rd, that  
is what **I seek**

אוֹתָהּ אֶבְקֵשׁ

Second half: Posuk 8

Your face, **O**  
L-rd, **I seek:**

ה' אֶבְקֵשׁ:

Why are the words from the first half of the *perek* echoed in the second half? What is the message of these seemingly two voices in our *perek*? In truth, these are not two different people but the same person. There are times in life when we feel confident, times that we can depend on Hashem and He has our back, and then there are other times when this

relationship is strained and tenuous - we are holding on by a thread.

If you look carefully, there are many dots surrounding the word - לֹלֶאֱ as if to use underline, bold, large font to underscore. Dovid states - “had I not the assurance that I would enjoy the goodness of the L-rd in the land of the living, had I not had Your assurance,” as if to say, if I did not think You, Hashem believed in me and that I would pull through, I might not have made it. Let us take another closer look at the word - לֹלֶאֱ. If you reverse the letters, it spells Elul - because it is in Elul that we may experience these feelings of spiritual despondency and despair.

The six *pesukim* of quiet confidence are followed by six *pesukim* of trepidation and fear. What joins the two halves and allows us to synthesize these two voices is the final *pasuk* – and, interestingly or rather intentionally, it repeats itself. These words address our real concerns - of a certain confidence of Hashem’s reach and support but at the same time, how will we make it.

As Dovid Hamelech concludes this *perek*, he states boldly to us - we who look to Tehillim for strength and support - קַוֵּה אֱלֹהֵי חֲזַק וְיִאֲמַץ לְבָבְךָ - קַוֵּה אֱלֹהֵי, hope to Hashem; strengthen yourself and He will give you courage, And hope to Hashem! The *pasuk* repeats this phrase - קַוֵּה אֱלֹהֵי twice. The root of the word hope is *kav* - line - Hashem is extending a lifeline to us, speaking to our dual voices - the voice of quiet confidence and faith and the voice of worry and fear. Strengthen yourself - חֲזַק and I will be there for you and give you courage to soldier on.

In a time where we may feel as though we are faltering - with unprecedented challenges, with

situations - whether it be personal, professional, family or community, that are facing us - Hashem is saying I have you, I will be your light and salvation. May we experience the redemption and see Hashem's light and salvation in the year 5781.

## A Daily Prayer with Special Significance at This Time of Year: *V'hu Rachum*

Dr. Rivkah Teitz Blau

וְהוּא רַחוּם is a verse about G-d's mercy that we repeat every day but is especially meaningful now. It comes from *Tehillim*, Psalm 78:38:

<p>He is full of compassion, forgiving iniquity and not destroying; frequently. He turns away His wrath, not stirring up all His anger.</p>	<p>וְהוּא רַחוּם   כִּפֵּר עוֹן וְלֹא יִשְׁתִּית וְהִרְבָּה לְהֵשִׁיב אָפוֹ וְלֹא יִעִיר כָּל־חַמְתּוֹ</p>
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We depend on G-d's mercy as we go through life. We make mistakes and we do not realize our ideals. Yet, we count on His kindness.

This verse is the mid-point of the Book of Psalms; it is an appropriate place to reflect on our relationship with Hashem, the theme of the entire *Sefer Tehillim*. In the 72 verses of this poem we review the wonders G-d has done for us: the miracles in Egypt; dividing the waters of the sea to let us pass safely; providing a cloud to lead us in daytime and a fire at night; and causing water to flow from a rock. We also recall our response. We complained; we didn't like the food; we were thirsty; we even made a golden calf. My *chavrusa*, Eliana Tieke, pointed out that the golden calf is the best sign that our sins can always be forgiven. If Hashem allowed us to recover from that offense, there is hope that if we repent, we may still be His nation.

This may be the reason we say this verse so often: before *ma'ariv*, the evening prayer; in *Tachanun* on Monday and Thursday; at *shacharis*, the morning prayer, three times—in *Hodu l'Hashem*, before *Ashrei*, and in *U'va l'Tzion*. Look at the verses that follow each morning. At the first mention, the verse that follows is "You, Hashem, withhold not your mercies from me; Your kindness and truth always protect me" (Ps.40:12). For the second, "Hashem, save; may the King answer us on the

day we call" (Ps.20:10). The verse following the third repetition is "For You, Hashem, are good and forgiving, and abundantly kind to all who call upon You" (Ps.86:5). These *pesukim* are a prelude. They enable us to turn to G-d. We count on His kindness.

The verse immediately after 78:38 offers a summary of human existence that elicits compassion: "He remembered that they were flesh, a wind that passes and will not return." The fragility of mankind, the ephemeral quality of our lives, calls for understanding. We may make choices that we regret.

Hashem gives us chances to correct them before we are gone. We have all acted in ways we wish we could undo. We have all made remarks that haunt us. In Psalm 19:13 we ask "Who can discern mistakes? Cleanse me from unperceived faults." We wish we had not erred. But as we begin each new day reciting these verses, we put yesterday behind us and depend on G-d's mercy to start afresh.

Similarly, on the New Year day, we recite them again. We put the past behind us and depend on G-d's kindness as we look forward to better choices in the year ahead!

כְּתִיבָה וְחִתִּימָה טוֹבָה

# Aseret Yemei Teshuvah

## The Addition of Shir Hama'alot Mima'amakim

Mrs. Sara Malka Winter

During these ten Days of Awe, we insert this Chapter 130 of Tehillim (Psalms) into our liturgy after Yishtabach and preceding the blessings of the morning Shema. It is a chapter that deals with the feeling of despair, of being immersed in sin and trouble--literally from the depths, and yet we emerge with hope and faith that ultimately, G-d's love and forgiveness.

### Verse One:

A song of ascents. | שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת מִמַּעַמְקִים  
Out of the depths I | קְרָאתִיךָ ה':  
call You, Hashem.

What are these depths?

Rav Hirsch tells us that it is double depths. We are in so much trouble, and we actually know that we plunged ourselves to the depths we now find ourselves in. Is there anything more depressing than that?

Rav Elya Lopian actually looks at these depths as the beginning of hope. Every Jew has at the depths of his heart, yearnings and strivings to come close to Hashem, to truly call out to Hashem. The problem is, it is often buried under so much dirt of desire for material and temporary pleasure. What Dovid is telling us, is at my depths, I am always crying out to You, I just need to reveal those depths, dig deep into my soul to find it.

### Verse: 2

O Hashem, listen to | אֲד-נִי שְׁמָעָה בְּקוֹלִי  
my cry; let Your ears | תְּהַיינָה אָזְנוֹךָ קְשׁוּבוֹת  
be attentive to my | לְקוֹל תַּחֲנוּנָי:  
plea for mercy.

Sometimes, we turn to G-d and say. 'I know I have sinned so much, I know I am in such low depths מעמקים, let this at least be a merit for me, that I am calling out to You. Do You hear, that I call to You!?'

### Verse 3

If You keep account of | אִם-עֲוֹנוֹת תִּשְׁמְרֶנָּה  
sins, O Hashem, | אֲדַנִּי מִי יַעֲמֵד  
Hashem, who will  
survive?

The name of ה' that is *yud* and *hei* and its numerical value 15 represent the perfection Hashem intended for this world. The fact that this world was formed with the laws of cause and effect. If someone will fall off a cliff, they will accelerate at the approximate rate of 9.8 meters per second squared, until they crash. And saying "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to, I wasn't warned!" None of that really matters at that point. Dovid Hamelech says: Hashem, we beg of you not to use this unforgiving law of nature when it comes to our sins. If you will truly count and keep our sins. Oh Hashem who will stand? And now of course, Dovid Hamelech uses the name of ה' which signifies מידת הרחמים, *mercy*.

### Verse 4

Yours is the power to | כִּי-עֹמֵךְ הַסְּלִיחָה לְמַעַן  
forgive so that You | תִּנְרָא  
may be held in awe.

Radak explains this verse to say: with all the powers Hashem has given to His angels, and celestial beings, He will never give over the power to forgive. And thus we do not turn to other beings to achieve forgiveness. עמך הסליחה *forgiveness remains with You*, so we continue to



develop our relationships only with You, and hold You in awe.

Malbim explains: a human being will decide whether and to what degree he will forgive based on the perpetrator of the crime. If the crime was not too severe, if the sinner is appropriately repentant, he will forgive. Forgiveness thus lies in the hands of the sinner. But in Hashem's world. We say: Hashem forgive us, because of You, because of Your greatness, Your awesome capacity to forgive *כי יעמך הסליחה*.

Verse 5

I look to the L-RD; I look to Him; I await His word.	<i>קִיִּיתִי ה' קוֹתָה נִפְשִׁי וְלִדְבָרְךָ הוֹחֵלְתִּי:</i>
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Malbim defines the difference between *תקוה*, *hope* and *יחול*, *expectation*. We can hope again and again, and there is no limit to our hopes, because they are grounded in our knowledge of what Hashem can do. But *חול* - expectations, we only have for promises Hashem explicitly made: our hopes are founded in our souls, and our expectations are founded in the word of Hashem.

Verse 6

I am more eager for the Lord than watchmen for the morning, watchmen for the morning.	<i>נִפְשִׁי לֹא דָנִי מִשְׁמָרִים לְבִקֵּר שְׁמָרִים לְבִקֵּר</i>
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In this verse, Dovid Hamelech expresses what it is that gives him hope, even as he knows that he has sinned, and what can give us hope, even as we have sinned, even as we face our imperfections. *נפשי לה*, *my soul* is for G-d. He made me, and He knew when he made me that I am imperfect. And I remain His, from these depths of my lowness, these depths I caused, I know that I wait for Hashem *לבקר משומרים* and can be sure of G-d's love, of G-d's eternal relationship. It is the bedrock of my existence. As sure as those who wait for morning knowing

that it will come is my clear faith in G-ds eternal love for me.

Verse 7

O Israel, wait for the LORD; for with the LORD is steadfast love and great power to redeem.	<i>יְהוָה יִשְׂרָאֵל אֱלֹהֵי כִּי עִמָּהּ הַחֲסֵד וְהַרְבָּה עִמּוֹ כְּבוֹד</i>
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Verse 8

It is He who will redeem Israel from all their iniquities.	<i>וְהוּא יִפְדֶּה אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִכָּל עֲוֹנוֹתָיו</i>
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Radak tells us that Dovid concludes this powerful chapter with a call to action to all of us. Dovid Hamelech now turns to Yisrael - to the Jew in all of us, and entreats us: turn to Hashem, for with Hahsem is kindness and so much salvation.

This is the time of year, when we sometimes feel overwhelmed and scared, especially in our imperfections. We want to run and hide from Hashem. Please wake me up when it is all over and we get to Simchat Torah. But Dovid cries out to us. And tells us: The very fact that you know you have sinned, is the key to your salvation. Turn to Hashem. He can save you from all your *aveiros*, sins. Do not waste this opportunity. What a comforting finale to this chapter that began with so much trepidation. Dovid Hamelech reminds us here, that Hashem will not only forgive us, but redeem us from our iniquities. We can emerge from the *teshuvah* process, not only forgiven and escaping punishment, but redeemed, and pure.

## Aseret Yemei Teshuvah: In Addition

Mrs. Rivka Alter

The 40 days between *Rosh Chodesh Elul* and Yom Kippur are referred to as *Yemei Ratzon* when Hashem is even more approachable than usual and ready and willing to accept our *tefillot*. We know that *tefillah* is such a central part of the *Yamim Nora'im* season. As we navigate through *Chodesh Elul*, Rosh Hashanah, the *Aseret Yemei Teshuvah*, and reach a climax with Yom Kippur, our *tefillot* assume increased levels of intensity. We see this phenomenon with the saying of *Selichot* leading up to Rosh Hashanah, and the many changes and additions to the Rosh Hashanah davening, several of which spill over into the rest of the *Aseret Yemei Teshuvah*. While our fate for the upcoming year is being determined and in limbo, we turn to Hashem as the all-powerful One who can ensure us our future. On day ten, within the emotionally laden *tefillot* of Yom Kippur, the intensity and desperation increase towards the end as we transition from asking to be **written** in the *Sefer Hachaim* to the dramatic finality in *Ne'ilah* of beseeching Hashem to **seal** us, hopefully in the *Sefer Hachaim*. Let us take a closer look at some of the pleas and declarations we make that are unique to this time of year.

There are six *hosafot*, or additions, to the *amidah* (silent Shmoneh Esrei prayer) to discuss. These six can be split into two categories. We will start by exploring the background and history behind these additions and changes. The *Gemara Brachot* 12b mentions two out of the six, or what we can call “group one”- the two different endings to everyday *brachot*:

Rabba bar Chinena Sava said in the name of Rav, for the whole year a person prays saying the words “מלך” and “הקל הקדוש” אהב צדקה ומשפט” except for the ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur when one prays “המלך הקדוש” and “המלך המשפט” instead.

ואמר רבה בר חנינא סבא משמיה דרב כל השנה כולה אדם מתפלל “האל הקדוש”, “מלך” אהב צדקה ומשפט”, חוץ מעשרה ימים שבין ראש השנה ויום הכפורים, שמתפלל “המלך הקדוש”, ו”המלך המשפט”.

In both of these cases from the *amidah*, the usual words that end each of these *brachot* are modified. The Gemara records a *machloket*, disagreement, about whether one needs to repeat the *amidah* if these textual changes are not made. The Gemara and Tosfot side with Rava’s opinion that the changes to the endings of these two *brachot* need to be articulated or else one needs to go back to the beginning of the *amidah* and start over. The *Beit Yosef*, on the *Tur* in *Hilchot Rosh Hashanah*, however, brings down this *machloket* and concludes with the opinion of the *Ri*, that *b’dieved* (basic level of performance of the mitzvah) one does not need to go back to recite the *bracha* of “*hamelech hamishpat*” since the word *melech* is still being referenced, although one still does need to go back for neglecting to switch to the words “*hamelech hakadosh*”. The *Rama* follows this opinion in *Siman* 118 in the *Shulchan Aruch*.

It is not until the time of the Geonim that the other four additions, or “group two”, make an appearance. The *Tur* mentions the opinion of the *Ri* that one would need to repeat the *amidah* if these four were omitted, but then seemingly sides with the opinion of his father, the *Rash*,

who said it does not make sense for the *halacha* to consider these four additions similar to “*hamelech hakadosh*” and “*hamelech hamishpat*” - - “כיון שאינו מוזכר בתלמוד” because these did not originate and are not mentioned in the Gemara like those in “group one” and therefore we do not share the same *halachic* concerns. The Ramban seemingly agrees with this opinion too.

Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch points out that the two main themes and focuses of the liturgy of Rosh Hashanah are about Hashem’s *malchut*, kingship, and about praying for *chaim*, life. We see how these are woven nicely into both groups of changes to the *amidah*. The two changed endings, mentioned in the Gemara, focus mainly on the *malchut* component - referencing Hashem *melech*, whereas the four additions in the beginning and ending *brachot* of the *amidah* emphasize the word *chaim*:

- (a) זכרינו לחיים...  
 (b) מי כמוך אב הרחמים זוכר יצוריו לחיים  
 ברחמים  
 (c) וכתוב לחיים טובים  
 (d) בספר חיים...

The other significant halachic discussion regarding these additions was brought up by the Geonim who questioned whether one is allowed to make requests in the beginning three *brachot* of the *amidah* and in the ending three *brachot* as it says on *Brachot* 34a:

Rav Yehuda says a person should not ask for his needs in the first three and last three blessings.

אָמַר רַב יְהוּדָה: לְעוֹלָם  
 אַל יִשְׁאַל אָדָם צְרָכָיו לֹא  
 בְּשִׁלֵּשׁ רֵאשׁוֹנוֹת, וְלֹא  
 בְּשִׁלֵּשׁ אַחֲרוֹנוֹת, אֶלָּא  
 בְּאֶמְצָעֵיּוֹת.

Requests are usually reserved for the middle section of the *amidah* exclusively and are framed by words of praise beforehand and of thanking Hashem afterwards. Requests are also limited on Shabbat and the *chagim*. So why were these additions, requests for life, specifically inserted into the beginning and ending sections? We can

resolve this question in a few different ways. Massechet Sofrim draws a distinction between the *tefillot* of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur versus the other *chagim*. Just as the endings of the *brachot* in the *amidah* are specialized for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and not the usual generic ending for holidays, so too are the rules for *tefillot* on these days distinct. Rav Hai Gaon resolves this differently and says that the types of requests that are generally withheld from these *brachot* are those of the individual, but requests made for the congregation are welcomed. We can see the communal nature of these four additions to the *amidah* being that they are all said in the plural. We could also suggest that asking for requests for material items may be what is restricted but a request for life itself is acceptable in any part of the *amidah*. The Tosfot Harash mentions a beautiful idea and resolves this *halachic* issue by saying there is no issue because these additions are not really requests after all, but are actually words of praise, and therefore well-suited in the locations where they are found. How so? When the *tzibbur*, congregation, directs its attention and requests something from Hashem and indicates that the entire *tzibbur* is totally dependent on Him for their needs, it manifests the ultimate praise one could give to Hashem.

There are a lot of interesting ideas to note about “group two”, the four *hosafot*, grouped together and referred to as “*zichronot*” in Massechet Sofrim. We know the term *zichronot* as one of the three major themes of Rosh Hashanah, and reflected in one of the names of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Hazikaron (Day of Remembrance). זכרינו לחיים is mentioned right before the *amidah*’s first *bracha* of מגן אברהם. In the second *bracha* of מי מחיה המתים we have the second addition of מי וכתוב לחיים. The third, כמוך אב הרחמים זוכר יצוריו הטוב comes in the second to last *bracha* of טוב בספר חיים - שמך ולך נאה להודות, and the last one - שים שלום comes in the last *bracha* of שים שלום. Each of these indicates in some way that Hashem is the one who remembers us, thereby judging us and outlining the fate of our year ahead. Most of these have formulations of the root *zachor*

(remember) in them. **Zochreinu l'chaim, zocher yitzurav l'chaim b'rachamim, b'sefer chaim bracha v'shalom...nizacher v'nechatev.** The one that seems out of place is the third addition that simply says *u'chtov l'chaim tovim kol bnei britecha* without any mention of the *shoresh: zachor*. Have no fear- earlier texts such as in Rambam's *hilchot tefillah* include the phrase **zechor rachamecha u'kvosh ka'ascha** which preceded the words *uchtov l'chaim tovim* but later on this line was shortened by the Achronim to be just the six words found in our machzor today.

I mentioned above that all four *hosafot* mention the word *chaim*. The last *hosafa* in the *bracha* of *Sim Shalom* talks about the **ספר החיים**. The Gemara Erchin 10b, in addressing why we do not say Hallel on Rosh Hashanah, depicts Hashem as a king sitting on a throne judging:

the books of life and of death are open in front of Him.	<b>וספרי חיים וספרי מתים פתוחין לפניו</b>
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How can we ensure that we end up in the book of life? The Ba'al Shem Tov says we can accomplish this through *kabbalat ol malchut shamayim*, accepting the yoke of Hashem upon us, and turning to and putting our trust in Hashem, the source of life. When we examine the first *hosafa*, **זכרינו לחיים**, we notice it is strategically placed in the *bracha* about the *avot*. They are the ones who lived life the way it was intended and merited to be written in the *sefer hachaim*. We beseech Hashem to remember the deeds of the *avot* when evaluating us. And how do we end this first addition? We ask to be written in the *sefer chaim*- **למעןך אלקים חיים**- for Your sake Hashem. We acknowledge that we desire life for Hashem's sake, so that we can continue to connect to Hashem through doing *ma'asim tovim*, good deeds, and not for our own benefit. In the second *hosafa* we articulate how there is no one as merciful as Hashem, who is **זוכר יצוריו לחיים ברחמים**- He remembers His creations with mercy. It is our way of acknowledging that we are not deserving of life

and we are flawed, but ask to be spared solely because we are Hashem's creations. We ask Hashem therefore to employ the *middah* of *rachamim* (attribute of mercy) because that is our only chance of survival. We see this concept in the first two *perakim* of *Sefer Bereishit*. Hashem is referred to solely as *elokim*, judge, in the first *perek* when He creates man. In the second *perek* when the story of creation is repeated, He is termed *Hashem Elokim*, indicating the fusion of *rachamim* (mercy) and *din* (judgment) together, which is the persona He adopts going forward in His interactions with man.

There is an interesting question to ask on addition #3. It is the one that really seems to be out of context. It is in the section dealing with thanking Hashem, right after the *bracha* of **מודים**, and the content of the addition seems to change course and make a request to be inscribed for a good life. How does this fit? I think this connects with the overall message of life which is inherently connected to words of praise. As we say in Hallel - **לא המתים יהללו יה** - we can only praise Hashem when we are alive. Not that Hashem needs our praise, but He does want us to recognize the need we have to praise Him. So, we request to keep living in order to continue our mission of praising Hashem. A lot of the Rishonim comment on the tally of words in each of these *hosafot* and what each number represents. While we do not have the time to look at most of those in this forum, I would like to mention one example with the first of the *hosafot* that is 11 words long. We ask Hashem to remember us with life because Hashem is *chafetz bachaim*- He wants us to live. These 11 words correspond to another 11 words from a *pasuk* in Yechezkel (18:23) that expresses this idea beautifully:

Hashem's desire is not for us to die but to allow us to repent and improve, when there is a need to, in order to continue living.	<b>הֲפֹץ אֲחַפֵּץ מוֹת רָשָׁע וְאִם אֲדַנִּי יְיָ-הוּא הֲלוֹא בְּשׁוּבוֹ מְדַרְכֵּי יְחִיָּה</b>
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This could be exactly what we are referencing and reminding Hashem about during this time - for the ability to do *teshuvah* and for the gift of Hashem's acceptance of our *teshuvah*.

Although although all four additions mention the word *chaim*, the first two *hosafot* simply say *chaim - zochreinu l'chaim* and *zocher yitzurav l'chaim berachamim*, but the remaining *hosafot* ask not just for life but for *chaim tovim*- as seen in *u'chtov l'chaim tovim*, and the ending of the fourth, *l'chaim tovim u-leshalom*. The Ramchal points out that the life we are really asking for and referring to is that of eternal life, *olam habah* and that is what *chaim* refers to. Our stated goal is to be granted this life. But, it is also often desirable to experience good in this world too. That is an extra added plus when we can avoid suffering in this world and still merit the next. But, he says, this does not work for everyone. Some people, when they experience a good *olam hazeh*, lose focus and no longer work towards *olam habah*, and instead forget about Hashem. Some people need the challenges in *olam hazeh* to orient them on turning to Hashem. So we start off in the *amidah* with asking for the most essential goal - *olam habah*, and only after we commit to working towards that goal in life, we ask Hashem, in the third and fourth additions, to reward us with a good life in this year as well, the *chaim tovim*.

I wanted to end with a kabbalistic insight from Rav Tzadok Hakohen of Lublin who comments on a pattern noticeable in these four additions. Each of them mentions *zechira* (rememberance,) *k'tiva* (inscribing) or both. The first addition mentions both. **Zochreinu l'chaim...v'katvenu b'sefer hachaim** and the last one mentions both - in *B'sefer chaim* we say **nizacher v'nichatev**. The middle two additions each mention only one of these. *Mi kamocha*, addition #2 mentions **zocher yitzurav** and the third addition starts off with **U'chtov l'chaim** with *k'tiva*. We have a pattern among the additions - the bookends mention both actions and the two middle additions each emphasize one of the two actions. When we talk about remembering, it is

abstract and connected to the more spiritual realm or the *neshamah*. Writing, on the other hand, is the opposite and is about taking abstract ideas and concretizing them and giving them physical form and shape through writing them down. The realm of *zichronot* is that of the *shamayim* (heavens), and the realm of the writing is in the *aretz* (earth). As such, the actions of Hashem are portrayed by the use of *zachor* and when it says *u'chtov* it is referring to the human actions on earth, such as praising Hashem. In *hosafa* #2 we talk about Hashem reviving the dead - that is solely His domain and is why we employ only the word **zocher**. In *hosafa* #3 when the context is about praising Hashem, the focus is on the human element and contribution and the additional words mention only **u'chtov**. By mentioning both *zechira* and *ketiva* in the first and last of the *hosafot*, we are alluding to the notion and life goal of intertwining our physical lives and actions on the *aretz* with the spiritual godliness of *shamayim*, of nurturing both our *guf* and our *neshama* and devoting them to Hashem in the upcoming year. With these ideas in mind, I want to share my hopes that the year 5781, תשפ"א should be a year of not only *chaim* but *chaim tovim u'leshalom* for us all.

## My Fear of Fear: ובכן תן פחדך

Chani Gotlieb

August drifts along at its drowsy, lazy, leisurely pace, with long days spent lounging outdoors between hammock and pool, with family and friends. Slowly we inch our way towards September, when the new school year will force us back into a structured routine of early mornings of alarm clocks and the daily march of demanding to-do lists. For us Jews there is yet another transition in mood at this time of year, as the month of Elul appears on the horizon, heralding *Tishrei*, the most intense month in the Hebrew calendar. Like a boisterous school boy willing August to stretch beyond its 31 days, I suspect I am not alone in pulling the metaphorical blanket over my head, wishing to hold on to the last moments of blissful summer and to disregard Elul's urgent message to shape up. Elul spells fear of Divine Judgement and retribution, and that fear makes me nervous and uncomfortable. I find myself fearing fear itself.

I have been there before, wishing to skip this tense frightening month of Elul with its call for self-scrutiny, digging up wrong doings I would rather forget, burdened by guilt and fearing the consequences of my poor choices. Would not a smooth August – September transition be a happier way to celebrate the Jewish new year? As a teaching colleague and friend once put it, we start the new semester trying to catch our breath, while at the same time riding the emotional roller coaster of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Succot. My friend often finds herself thinking, "I can't wait for *Cheshvan*," the month following *Tishrei* where there are no frenetic Jewish landmarks to punctuate the quiet routine.

One strategy I made use of in the past to combat this discomfort, was to focus on the less daunting aspects of the Days of Awe; the joy

evoked by the coronation of Hashem on Rosh Hashanah and the happiness of achieving atonement on Yom Kippur. Perhaps this celebratory tone is a more positive and affirming way to approach a new year, simultaneously serving to protect me from those uncomfortable feelings. Yet, eliminating the element of fear completely from the holidays known as the Days of Awe, is not really in line with the liturgy that we read. Capturing the essence of these days, our Sages instituted a special prayer in which we beseech Hashem to imbue us with fear. This prayer is incorporated in the third blessing of every *amidah* (*Shemoneh Esrei*) prayer of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

And so grant that  
your awe, Hashem  
will be upon all your  
works and your dread  
upon all you have  
created

ובכן תן פחדך ה' א-להינו  
על כל מעשיך ואימתך על  
כל מה שבראת

Fear, it seems, is not just an inevitable side effect of the days of judgement, it is an integral feature that we actually request, in every one of the 13 *amidah* prayers of the High Holiday. How am I supposed to repeat this plea to be endowed with fear while at the time trying so hard to avoid it?

Echoing my sentiment, an eminent psychiatrist, acutely aware of the unhealthy mental toll that fear has on mankind, once suggested to Rav Soloveitchik that if he personally had the authority, he would omit this prayer. Why should one pray for fear when fear, or anxiety, is one of the major causes of mental illness?

In response, the Rav elaborated on the universal experience of fear, listing the various vulnerabilities that are innate to the human condition.

“Everyone seems to be beset with fears of all kinds. Some are afraid that they will not be able to succeed in their careers, others fear losing their wealth or status or that they will fail to attain sufficient prominence. Many people are afraid of sickness and bodily weakness. In generations past, fear of leprosy engulfed the world; today people live in fear of cancerous growth. Many people do not go to see a doctor even when they have pains lest he diagnose “the disease.” And in 2020, robbed of the security of a predictable world, Corona tops the list of anxiety triggers that has afflicted all humans.

The Rav continues in his *drashah* as brought down in the book “On Repentance” p. 223, “Man is plagued constantly by all sorts of lesser fears. I am not a psychiatrist, but I do know that one major source of fear can wipe out all these lesser fears. What fear can overtake man, thereby uprooting all other fears, such as that of failure, of poverty, of old age, of rejection or of disease? Only the fear of the Lord! That is the reason behind the expression in the High Holy Day prayer, Cast [Your] fear, O Lord our G-d, upon all [Your] handiwork and [Your] awe upon all that [You have] created.)” We pray that this great fear will free us from those other ones which lurk everywhere, upsetting our lives. “

Or as Rabbi Rachamim Buchrise of Djerba so eloquently put it: “If you fear the One, you will fear no one, if you don’t fear the One, you will fear everyone.”

With this beautiful message the prominent Dayan of Djerva sought to encourage his anxious son, about to embark on the hazardous trip to the Land of Israel. In the late 1800s the sea voyage from Tunisia to the Holy Land was indeed fraught with dangers. Yet the fear of the One, can redeem us of every other fear.

In other words, a fear-free life is not an attainable goal. Nor is it a desirable one. We are hard wired to experience fear. We need fear. It keeps us from harm. It protects us from getting burned. From falling off the cliff. From entering a place of mortal danger. It is a survival instinct. A gift from G-d. Yet like any one other emotion it must be balanced to allow us to function well. On the Days of Awe we are not asking for more anxieties and phobias. Our prayer to be granted fear of the Divine is in fact a remedy for all the lesser fears that inflict us threatening our mental well-being.

With that in mind we can understand the frequent commandment addressed to the giants of faith in the Torah when they faced dire circumstances: “*Al tira* – Fear not!”, implying that they indeed felt fear too. The most courageous heroes, Avraham, Moshe, David were not fearless. Only a fool is fearless when dangers are real. The hero, however, is the one who somehow hears G-d’s urging “*al tira*” and acts despite his or her fears. A careful reading reveals that the commandment not to fear the impending dangers is in most instances followed by the reassurance of the Divine’s Presence. Just when they felt most vulnerable, most alone, so many of our prophets heard and delivered G-d’s message of hope: “Fear not, for I am with you. Do not be frightened, for I am your G-d.”

And what does the repetition of this commandment say about our G-d? As big as our fears are, G-d is bigger still. Because the Eternal One is constant and whole, G-d can contain our fears, absorb the shock of them, until we feel ourselves strong enough to carry on. Sometimes just a whisper, sometimes a shout, the Divine command, “*al tir’u*,” echoes and reverberates throughout Jewish history, urging our people onward, come what may.

There is one kind of fear, however, which is encouraged: *yirat Hashem* “fear of G-d.” In contrast to the verb “*pachad*,” “*yirah*” is often translated more softly as “reverence” or “awe,”

*yirat Hashem* is a distinct mitzvah intended to put all other fears into perspective

Rav Soloveitchik explains the difference between the two Hebrew synonyms for fear: *pachad* and *yirah*. *Pachad* [fear] is an overwhelming paralyzing emotional state, as in the experience described in the prayer *U'netaneh Tokef*: "And the great shofar will be sounded and a still, thin voice will be heard, and the angels shake, terror and trembling will seize them" In contrast *yirah* (awe) "suggests reverence and loyalty, as exemplified in the Biblical command, "Every man shall revere (*tira'u*) his mother and father" (Leviticus 19:3)." In this sense *yirah* (awe) is not simply an emotion, but it is also a call for action. *Yirah* (awe) forms the basis for an intricate system of behaviors that guide and govern a person's relationship to his or her parents, teachers, and even G-d.

According to the Rav's interpretation, we pray for the capacity to transform the initial paralyzing fear aroused with the advance of the Days of Awe into a mobilizing constructive force – *yirah*. We begin by asking for fear *uvechen ten pachdecha* and continue to express our desire for the more mature stage of reverence – *veyira'ucha kol hama'asim*.

The next lines of the prayer describe the revolutionary effect of *yirah* on mankind.

And all created beings will prostrate themselves before You and may they all form a single band to do Your will with a perfect heart.

וּשְׂתַחֲוּ לְפָנֶיךָ כָּל  
הַבְּרוּאִים וַיַּעֲשׂוּ כֹּלָם  
אֶגוּדָה אַחַת לַעֲשׂוֹת  
רְצוֹנְךָ בְּלִבָּב שְׁלָם

Indeed it is this ideal picture of a transformed humanity which is the focus of our prayers during the Days of Awe. The paralyzing fear invoked by judgment, though uncomfortable, is the conduit to achieve the more mature stage of reverence. Rabbi Yitchak Balazer reiterates this process using a slightly different terminology. The fear of divine retribution *yirat ha'onesh* is the first rung in the ladder. It is tangible and must be cultivated first before we can ascend the next rung of *yirat haromemut* – reverence.

As we edge our way closer to Hashem through the month of Elul, slowly closing the gap that has separated us from Him, we come to the Day of Judgement and plead to be imbued with the fear of heaven that will release us of all our debilitating fears. We ask to be constantly cognizant of the heavenly umbrella, metaphorically speaking, so that we do not need to worry about the elements. To focus on the One and Only who is really in control of every aspect of our lives instead of wrongly attributing the focus of control in our lives to earthly sources - the president, our boss, Iran, cancer, Corona, or the myriad of other possibilities, relevant in each of our personal lives.

We conclude the long services of the Days of Awe with the verse from Psalms incorporated in the beautifully haunting *piyyut*: *Adon Olam, Hashem li, velo ira* - G-d is with me, I shall not fear. We sing these treasured words as we make our way from the sanctuary to the outside world. Armed with an internal fear and in awe of Hashem, we are liberated from all other earthly fears, ready to face with courage the perils of the outside and use our *yirah/awe* as a constructive mobilizing force.

With the fear of **The One** deeply entrenched in our hearts, we fear no one.

What a reassuring way to start a new year!



# Avinu Malkeinu

Mrs. Emma Katz

*Avinu Malkeinu* is arguably one of the most iconic *tefillot* of the *Yamim Noraim*, filled with heartfelt pleas to Hashem. The haunting tune of the final verse rings in our ears long after we leave the shul. We have become so familiar with the text of this prayer, in which we address Hashem as both our King and our Father, but why do we do that? Is Hashem our father, or is He our King? It seems almost desperate to use both, as if we cannot properly formulate our *tefillah*. Why do we use this seemingly haphazard formulation?

The first time this formulation of *Avinu Malkeinu* can be found is in the *Gemara* in *Masechet Taanit*:

## Taanit 25b

Another story is told [about prayer in the time of a drought]: Rabbi Eliezer prayed before the ark and said 24 blessings but was not answered. Rabbi Akiva prayed after him and said, "*Avinu, Malkeinu*, we have no Sovereign but you! *Avinu, Malkeinu* on your own account have mercy on us!" and the rains fell.

## תענית כ"ה

שוב מעשה בר' אליעזר שירד לפני התיבה ואמר עשרים וארבע ברכות ולא נענה ירד רבי עקיבא אחריו ואמר אבינו מלכנו אין לנו מלך אלא אתה אבינו מלכנו למען רחם עלינו וירדו גשמים

We see from the first usage that this language is effective. However, we still are not given insight as to why that is. A *Gemara* in *Masechet Yoma* regarding the nature of *teshuvah* will give us further insight:

## Yoma 86b

Reish Lakish said: Great is repentance, as the penitent's intentional sins are counted for him as unwitting transgressions, as it is stated: "Return, Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled in your iniquity" (Hosea 14:2). The *Gemara* analyzes this: Doesn't "iniquity" mean an intentional sin? Yet the prophet calls it stumbling, implying that

## יומא פ"ו:

אמר ריש לקיש גדולה תשובה שזדונות נעשות לו כשגגות שנאמר (הושע יד, ב) שובה ישראל עד ה' אלהיך כי כשלת בעונך הא עון מזיד הוא וקא קרי ליה מכשול איני והאמר ריש לקיש גדולה תשובה שזדונות נעשות לו כזכיות שנאמר (יחזקאל לג, יט) ובשוב רשע מרשעתו ועשה משפט וצדקה עליהם (חיה) יחיה לא קשיא כאן מאהבה כאן מיראה

one who repents is considered as though he only stumbled accidentally in his transgression. The *Gemara* asks: Is that so? Didn't Reish Lakish himself say: Great is repentance, as one's intentional sins are counted for him as merits, as it is stated: "And when the wicked turns from his wickedness, and does that which is lawful and right, he shall live thereby" (Ezekiel 33:19), and all his deeds, even his transgressions, will become praiseworthy? The *Gemara* reconciles: This is not difficult: Here, when one repents out of love, his sins become like merits; there, when one repents out of fear, his sins are counted as unwitting transgressions.

The *Gemara* explains that there are two levels of *teshuvah*, one which lessens the severity of the punishment, and one which converts your sins into merits. The *Gemara* concludes by delineating the difference between the two levels of *teshuvah*; *teshuvah* that lessens the severity of the punishment is *teshuvah* done from fear, and *teshuvah* that switches sins to merits is *teshuvah* done from love. What is so unique about *teshuvah* done from love that it can convert your sins into merits? Rav Soloveitchik in "*Al Hateshuvah*" defines both *teshuvah* from fear and *teshuvah* from love. He states that *teshuvah* from fear is one of deep pain, embarrassment, and regret for what was done. *Teshuvah* from love is one born completely from a desire to grow closer and repair our relationship with Hashem. The Rav suggests that when one does *teshuvah* from love, they view their past sins as stepping stones on their path to becoming better *Ovdei Hashem*, as opposed to stumbling blocks. Therefore, the sins themselves fuel their future positive actions, converting their sins into merits.

Based on this understanding of Rav Soloveitchik, we can understand the message of *Avinu Malkeinu*. There is the "*Malkeinu*" approach to doing *teshuvah*, where we come before Hashem, the law enforcer, with fear and trepidation, and beg for our lives. This is not a negative imagery, but a scary one nonetheless. Before we use that imagery, we place the imagery of "*Avinu*"; We come before Hashem, not as our law-enforcer, but as our Father. This Father, as we know, has endless, unconditional love for us. We know that as a Father, Hashem is trying to guide us and help us to become the best versions of ourselves. This is the *teshuvah* from love approach- that we come before Hashem in an effort to make Him proud, and show Him how we want to change. As our Father, we ask for His help in becoming our best selves. We say *Avinu Malkeinu*- Hashem, we know you are the law-enforcer and the King of the world, and we are your servants. But please, Hashem, before doing a strict accounting of our sins and merits, please look at us as your children. We are not asking for you to ignore our sins, rather, we are

asking for help to grow from them. Please help us Hashem, listen to our pleas, and give us that support to grow! May we merit to be able to approach Hashem as both *Avinu* and *Malkeinu*, with the knowledge and regret for what we have done wrong, and the desire to learn, to grow, and to become better.

# Torah Reading for the First Day of Rosh Hashanah

## Bereishit Chapter 21

Mrs. Stacey Goldman

This *parasha* encompasses the birth of Yitzchak, his weaning, the sending away of Yishmael and Hagar, the treaty with Avimelech, the king of the Plishtim and Avraham's planting of a grove and calling out the name of Hashem.

The reading opens with Hashem "remembering" Sarah את שרה, the first of three barren women - Sarah, Rachel and Chana - whom the Rabbis tell us were "remembered" on Rosh Hashanah. The *haftara* for this day features Chana and the second day's *haftarah* mentions Rachel.

After Sarah becomes pregnant and gives birth, Avraham names their child Yitzchak, meaning "He will laugh." The Hebrew root of this name, ק.ח.צ is the Hebrew root for laughter ק.ח.צ and it appears no less than 9 times throughout the course of this Torah reading. We will explore the significance of this word and what it means for Sarah, Avraham, Yishmael and Yitzchak and how we can find inspiration from these concepts today, and especially on Rosh Hashanah.

We read earlier, in Chapter 17, when Hashem told Avraham that he would have a son and name him Yitzchak, Avraham laughs:

Avraham threw himself on his face **and laughed**, as he said to himself, "Can a child be born to a man a hundred years old, or can Sarah bear a child at ninety?"

וַיִּפֹּל אַבְרָהָם עַל-פָּנָיו  
וַיִּצְחַק וַיֹּאמֶר בְּלִבִּי  
הֲלֵבֵן מֵאָה שָׁנָה יֵלֵד  
וְאִם-שָׂרָה הִבְתִּיתִּישְׁעִים  
שָׁנָה תֵלֵד:

And Avraham said to God, "O that Ishmael might live by Your favor!"

וַיֹּאמֶר אַבְרָהָם אֶל-  
הָאֱלֹהִים לוֹ יִשְׁמְעָאֵל  
יַחֲיֶה לְפָנֶיךָ:

G-d said, "Nevertheless, Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall name him **Isaac**; and I will maintain My covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring to come.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים  
אֲבָל שָׂרָה  
אֲשֶׁתְּךָ יֵלֵד לְךָ  
בֵּן וְקָרָאתָ אֶת-שְׁמוֹ  
יִצְחָק וְהִקְמַתִּי אֶת-  
בְּרִיתִי אִתּוֹ לְבְרִית  
עוֹלָם לְזַרְעוֹ אַחֲרָיו:

(Note: This passage seems to foreshadow our Rosh Hashanah reading with the birth of Yitzchak and the sending away of Yishmael.)

More famously, Sarah also laughs when she hears the three angels tell Avraham that they would indeed have a child.

And Sarah **laughed to herself**, saying, "Now that I am withered, am I to have enjoyment—with my husband so old?"

וַתִּצְחַק שָׂרָה בְּקִרְבָּהּ  
לֵאמֹר אַחֲרַי בְּלִתִּי  
הֲיִתְהַלְּלִי עַדְנָה וְאֵדְנִי  
זָקֵן:

Whereas Hashem seems to accept Avraham's laughter, He chastises Sarah for her laughter to Avraham:

Then the LORD said to Avraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, saying, ‘Shall I in truth bear a child, old as I am?’”

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־אַבְרָהָם  
לָמָּה זֶה צָחָקָה שָׂרָה  
לֵאמֹר הֲאֵף אֲמַנָּם אֶלֶד  
וְאֲנִי זָקֵנָתִי:

This indicates a joyous laughter

וְחֵדִי

For Sarah he writes:

This indicates a mocking laughter or disbelief

וְחִכְתַּת שָׂרָה

Is anything too wondrous for the LORD? “I will return to you at the same season next year, and Sarah shall have a son.”

הֲיִפְלֵא מִה' דְּבַר לְמוֹעֵד  
אֲשׁוּב אֵלֶיךָ כְּעֵת חַיָּה  
וְלִשְׂרָה בֵן:

Now we can better understand why Hashem chastised Sarah and not Avraham for laughing at the news of a child at their advanced ages.

However, we are left with the question how Sarah could have denied the fact that she laughed, and to Hashem no less, the omniscient One!

Even more surprising is Sarah’s denial of her laughter:

Sarah lied, saying, “**I did not laugh,**” for she was frightened. But He replied, “**You did laugh.**”

וּתְכַחַשׁ שָׂרָה | לֵאמֹר  
לֹא צָחַקְתִּי כִּי | יִרְאָה  
וַיֹּאמֶר | לֹא כִּי צָחַקְתְּ:

The Sefas Emes, a Chassidish Rebbe from 19th century Poland, offers us a very deep understanding of these verses that will shed light into our Rosh Hashanah reading.

He notes that there have been many commentaries that ask this question. He explains:

Whether she was afraid or not, why would she feel she could deny her actions to the omniscient One, Hashem?

Was there a qualitative difference between the two laughters? Indeed, Targum Onkelos the divinely inspired Aramaic translation from the turn of the millennium written by a righteous Roman convert, subtly asserts different emotions behind each one’s reaction. Onkelos’ translation is known for hewing very carefully to the biblical Hebrew and rarely inserting extra words as other classic Biblical translations are wont to do. Surprisingly, he chooses two distinct Aramaic words for the same Hebrew root. For Avraham, Onkelos translates laughter as:

That of course Sarah immediately fixed her sin with repentance and by way of this repentance she erased the sin as if she had never laughed.

בפסוק ותכחש שרה  
כו'. כי יראה כו' לא כי  
צחקת. ותמהו כל  
המפרשים האיך כחשה  
שרה. ויש לפרש כי  
בודאי שרה מיד תקנה  
החטא בתשובה וע"י  
תשובה נמחק החטא  
כאלו לא צחקה  
מעולם.

However, there is repentance from fear, and there is repentance from love. And by way of love, the sin is transformed into a merit.

אכן יש תשובה  
מיראה ויש מאהבה  
ועל ידי אהבה נהפך  
החטא לזכות

And this is why it says that she denied it, saying, "I did not laugh," that is to say only that she feared.

וז"ש ותכחש לאמר לא צחקתי היינו רק כי יראה.

everyone who hears will laugh with me!" Rashi explains that "Many barren women were remembered with her; many sick people were healed on that very day; many prayers were answered with hers, and there was much joy in the world." We can almost feel the joy that was brought to the world through Sarah's extra effort to deepen her *teshuvah*.

But Avraham had the aspect of repentance from love and that is what is meant by, "no, but you laughed" meaning, that it is necessary to fix the laughter itself to be a merit.

אבל אברהם הי' בחי' תשובה מאהבה וז"ש לא כי צחקת פי' שצריכין לתקן הצחוק בעצמו להיות זכות

Perhaps Sarah received a bonus gift through her newfound appreciation of the different qualities of laughter. Indeed, the seventh time we see this root is in verse 9:

For that laughter was indeed necessary because it was because of this transformed laughter that he was called Yitzchak!

שהרי באמת הוצרך הצחוק שעל שם זה נק' יצחק

Sarah saw the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne to Avraham metzacheik

והיא שרה את־בְּרָהֶגֶר המצרית אשר־לָקְחָה לאברהם מצחק

In addition, afterwards, Sarah herself said (which is found in our Torah reading Chapter 21 verse 6) "G-d has made me laughter" behold she fixed the entire laughter to turn it into a merit!

וגם אח"כ אמרה שרה בעצמה צחוק עשה לי אלקים הרי שתיקנה כל הצחוק להפכו לזכות

It is unclear exactly what *metzacheik* means and what Yishmael was doing, although the *Midrashim* have plenty to say, but Sarah, due to her newfound insights into *tzchok*, laughter, was able to discern that it was not positive. Indeed, Onkelos translates it as *מְחִיִּיד*, the same Aramaic word for Sarah's pre-repentance laughter. Sarah knew that she would not be able to properly raise Yitzchak with this aspect of mockery in the house. Avraham, who was never challenged in the qualitative aspect of his laughter, was not able to see the negative attributes in his son. Perhaps this can help us understand the Talmudic dictum, "In a place where a *ba'al teshuvah* stands, even a full *tzaddik* cannot stand" (Brachot 34b). While Sarah was wrong in her reaction to Hashem's promise that she would have a son, it was clearly the deep introspection she did as a result of her misdeed that brought her to an even higher level of spirituality. Indeed, when Hashem exhorts Avraham to listen to Sarah in this matter, Rashi quotes the Midrash which tells us that "We learn from here that Avraham was inferior to Sarah in prophecy."

The Sefas Emes explains that Sarah could honestly say she did not laugh as she erased her mocking disbelief of Hashem's capabilities through her *teshuvah meyirah*, repentance out of fear. Hashem, however, had much higher expectations for Sarah and her son. He knew that if Sarah recognized that she could plunge into deeper spiritual depths, she could transform that laughter into a merit, a rejoicing for the whole world. After thanking Hashem in our Torah reading for making this newly transformed laughter for her, Sarah says, כל-

As we approach this coming Rosh Hashanah, may we all reflect on our deeds of the past year and may we be worthy of turning all of our sins into merits to bring joy to ourselves, our families, and all of *Klal Yisrael*. May we see true joy enter the world speedily in our day.

והי' הכנה בחי' התשובה קודם לידת יצחק שלא הי'  
באפשרי להיות קיום במדת הפחד של יצחק לכן הקדים  
הקב"ה בחי' התשובה ונקרא יצחק שהוא מיתוק הדין  
כמ"ש בזה"ק:

# Rosh Hashanah: Torah Reading Day 1

## Chana's Prayer

Mrs. Liat Mayerfeld

Many of the laws and customs of prayer are learned from the way Chana prayed. We also learn the deepest secrets of how to pray, to know what we need, to ask Hashem for it and how to make requests that are answered.

The story takes place approximately three thousand years ago. Chana, who has no children, is one of Elkana's two wives. His other wife is Penina and she has many children. We imagine this reality is never easy for Chana but never is it more painful as when the entire family goes to Shiloh for a yearly pilgrimage, to bring offerings to Hashem. Penina and her children are given portions of food while Chana is given a special portion because Elkana loves her so much. But every year she cries and cries. Elkana, a good husband, tries to show his love - "Isn't my love for you greater than of ten children?!" Yet, Chana feels that something is missing - something is not right.

One year, Chana leaves the thanksgiving celebration and finds herself a quiet place to pray. Tears stream down her face as her emotions soar. Her lips are moving as she pronounces the words with no sound emerging. Her body is completely immersed in concentration. Chana calls out to G-d and the Talmud fills in her words. Prayer that comes from such a deep and real place brings about a miracle. These are words that so to speak force G-d to change her reality.

The most common of the Hebrew words for prayer, *tefillah*, means introspection. In *tefillah* experience, we look into ourselves. Who am I? What is my purpose? How can I use the gifts G-d has given me? For example, every morning we thank G-d for a whole list of things: Thank you Hashem for eyes that see, Thank you Hashem for legs that walk, Thank you for a mind that can process to list but a few. G-d does not need our thanks. So why do we go through the process of thanking him in such detail? We verbally give thanks because it teaches us the importance of appreciation, to always recognize our blessings.

This recognition is meant to be taken a step further. We are tasked to give an honest appraisal of what we have done and what we plan to do with all the gifts granted to us. Each one of us is directed to think about what are we going to do with all that I have been given? These gifts were given to us specifically for a reason so we have the responsibility to use them wisely and intentionally.

This is the purpose of three daily prayers. In the morning we start with my daily plan of how to use all of our gifts. Midday is an opportunity to stop to assess if the plan is on track and refocus on these goals. The day ends looking back on the day's achievements. The Talmud in Berachot 31 describes Chana's self-appraisal. "Hashem- You have given me eyes to see, ears to hear, a nose to smell, a mouth to speak, hands with which to perform labor, feet with which to walk, breasts with which to nurse. Please give me a child to nurse!"

I imagine she did not just mention these limbs as a lengthy list. Chana was evaluating how she used her gifts. My eyes, how have I used them? I have used them only for good - to see the good in people, to see what is needed, to appreciate your world. My ears, what have I done with them? I listened and empathized with my husband. I heard poor people's cry. My mouth has spoken no evil, my words have soothed my family and friends. My hands and feet have rushed to do your mitzvot. Amazingly Chana can say she has used all the gifts she has been given completely! She judges herself and everything she has. After a complete head to toe evaluation Chana concludes that she has used every single gift, every single opportunity completely and absolutely, totally for its spiritual purpose with nothing has been wasted. Imagine that one can say and know that he or she has maximized everything in life for its spiritual purpose.

Only one thing is left, she says and that is her female reproductive organs. "Those I have not been able to use Hashem!" she cries. "If I have used everything I am meant to use then my life can be over. I will have



completed my purpose. But if I am to live, give me a child so that I can use these parts of myself as well. These organs must achieve their spiritual purpose." Chana speaks strongly but her prayer comes from a place of humility. She states, "Hashem, you are the master of all worlds. Everything is you." And she continues, "Everything in this world is for you. Everything I do is for you. I need you to be part of everything in my life!" Chana's prayers are answered with a child. She continues her life with her son Shmuel, with the same focus of godliness and spirituality in everything.

We are often taught that all prayers are answered, except sometimes the answer is no. I never liked that as a child and to be honest I do not like it as an adult. I like prayer when the answer is yes. While one cannot promise a specific physical outcome of prayer or miracles, I would like to share a method in prayer where the response from Hashem is always a resounding yes.

Rav Dessler in his famous philosophical work *Michtav Me'Eliyahu, Strive for Truth*, teaches us which prayer will always be answered in the positive. It is the same approach that Chana uses and a concept we can learn ourselves. We are asked to look in Tehillim 145- a chapter that we actually say twice a day - *ashrei*. In one of the verses we say - *karov Hashem Ichol kor'av* - Hashem is close to all those that call out to him, *lechol asher yikre'uhu be'emet* - to all those that call out to Him sincerely. Hashem is close to all those that call out to him. How does this happen, how does this work? Many people ascribe to the "Amazon method of prayer", referably Prime. I pray for a whole list of things that I want and since I am a pretty good person and I have prayed very hard, I should get those things. This method works amazingly online but does it work with G-d? If I send G-d a shopping list, maybe I will get some of the things I ask for - maybe some money although usually not as much as I think I need; some health, not always as good as what I would want; a new car, though perhaps not the convertible I'd specifically requested. The Amazon shopping list approach to prayer is not guaranteed at all. Rav Dessler described another prayer method. The key to prayer, he teaches, is in WHAT we ask. Hashem is close to all those who call out to him. When we call out and ask Hashem to be close, He will

always be there. The prayer asking to find G-d in our lives is always answered with a yes!

Often we think we have ourselves covered. We are capable and in control. Things are going well and perhaps we turn to G-d to ask for more. Sometimes it may not going so well. I may have made half-hearted decisions and I may turn to G-d to ask for changes. Maybe He solves the problems in the way that we wanted or maybe not. But this is not the guaranteed prayer. The guaranteed prayer is when we turn to Hashem and say, "My life is perfect and I need you to be part of it. I need to know that this is your connection with me." It is then that Hashem says "Here I am. I am with you." Or we turn to Gd and we say "I am confused. This is not what I had planned. I need you to be part of this, I need to know that through this all, You are with me." And Hashem says "Here I am. I am with you."

Rav Dessler's method of prayer is when we ask Hashem to be close to us, to be part of everything we do, and then the answer is always yes. Chana turned to G-d and said, "There is no purpose to anything unless I can use it to be close to you and to feel that you are close to me." Everything we are given in life has a purpose, everything we are not given in life has a purpose. The purpose is always G-dliness. The challenge is for us to bring Hashem into my life and to see him everywhere. The Kotzker rebbe, who was known for his wit, asks and answers, where can one find Hashem? His response is wherever we let him in.

We read the story of Chana's prayer on Rosh Hashanah - the day we are judged for what the next year will bring. Rosh Hashanah is the time to honestly focus and genuinely think, much like Chana, what do I dream of for this coming year? We turn to G-d and say that everything that we will be given, we ask for it so that we can see you close, so we can bring you into our lives, so we can share spirituality with others. All the things we will not be given, we see Hashem there too. He is close to us there too. This prayer calls out to G-d from the true depths of our being acknowledging that everything we do is for His glory, to create a spiritual reality in this physical world. When we open ourselves to seeing Him, He is always close. When we ask Hashem to be part of our lives, the answer is always yes.

# Rosh Hashanah: Tekiat Shofar

## Introduction and Inspiration

Mrs. Bruria Siegel

I want to start off by telling you a story. When I was growing up there a girl in our shul, a couple years older than me, who got engaged to a really great guy, a frum boy, a real *ben Torah*, who had an interesting journey, an interesting story of how he had gotten there. He had grown up in a *frum* home, had enlisted in the Israeli army, and when he was done with his Tzahal service he decided, like many of his friends, to spend some time in Mumbai, India. He wanted to recover from the intensity of war before moving on with the rest of his life. Sadly, it was only a matter of months before he had entirely abandoned religion - there was no more Shabbat, *kashrut*. He was living with his girlfriend and he would spend most of his days and nights partying in Mumbai.

One night he is out with his girlfriend and they are sitting in an outdoor bar. He hears a sound. At first, he does not recognize that sound and then it hits him - that's the sound of a shofar. He looks around and he sees on the street corner in downtown Mumbai a Chabad rabbi blowing a shofar. He thinks to himself, "Oh my gosh, today must be Rosh Hashanah." He runs up to the rabbi and he asks, "Is today Rosh Hashanah?" and the rabbi confirms that yes, in fact, it is. He looks at the sky, sees the sun setting and realizes the entire day went by and he did not even know.

He is shaken up. He runs back to his room, packs up his bags and he returns to Israel. He enrolls in yeshiva in Israel, spends many years learning there, and is now a very serious *ben Torah* and a really *frum* person.

When I first heard that story I was just in awe of the power of the shofar. We always say that the shofar is a wakeup call to us and sometimes we do not see it, but in this story, so clearly it awakened this Jewish *neshama*. But I have to be honest that it is also a little disheartening because when I hear this story I also think, "Will I ever be able to tap into the sound of the shofar the way he did? When we hear the shofar on Rosh Hashanah, does it ignite passion within us? Does it inspire us to make those kinds of changes? What I'm hoping to do in the little time that we have together is explore a piece from the *Pachad Yitzchak*, Rav Yitzchak Hutner, which, hopefully at the end we will be able to say, yes, it can inspire us, it can change us, it can motivate us to make drastic changes in our own lives. So, let's begin.

Rav Hutner explains that the reason the shofar speaks to the heart and soul of a Jew is not because of its beautiful sound or its melodious tune, but because it reminds us of who we are and where we come from.

How does that work - how does the shofar remind us of that? When we blow the shofar, we remember a blow that happened on Rosh Hashanah, but thousands of years ago. According to the Midrash, Rosh Hashanah is not celebrating the first day of creation, but rather the sixth day of creation, the day when man was created. If we think about it, it actually makes a lot of sense, because, G-d creates this world and in the first five days, as beautiful as breathtaking and majestic as it is, it serves no purpose. But then on Day Six, when man comes along

everything changes. Now the world has meaning and purpose, because the world is the stage or the backdrop on which man can really get close to G-d.

So, if it's true that Rosh Hashanah celebrates the sixth day of creation, the day on which man was created, let's describe what happened on that day. We know that G-d mixes together some dirt, some water, makes some kind of amazing dough, forms it into a human being - shapes it arms, legs, a nose, a face - and then finally, at the culmination, *ויפח באפיו נשמת חיים*, *He blows into man a breath of life*. For this I like to imagine blowing up a balloon. If I take a deep breath and blow up a balloon, and now I look at that balloon. That air that's in that balloon, a few seconds ago, was in me. Meaning a piece of me, so to speak, is in the balloon. We can use this imagery to understand the Zohar's description of the creation – he explains that when G-d blew into us He blew part of Himself into us, *מאן דנפח מתוכו נפח*, when a person blows, he blows from within. Essentially, when G-d breathed life into Adam, He was infusing man with a piece of Godliness; G-d's breath, so to speak, was what gave man life.

And that, explains Rav Hutner, is why the words *neschama* (נשמה) a soul, and *neschima*, נשימה, a breath are so similar. Our *neschama* came into being through a *neschima*, a breath of G-d. It is interesting that the word in English, 'inspiration,' also comes from the day in Gan Eden when G-d inspired breath into man. It is the same idea.

On that Rosh Hashanah thousands of years ago in Gan Eden, someone was blowing, but that time it wasn't man blowing a shofar, it was G-d blowing life into man. Now, every year on Rosh Hashanah when we blow the shofar, we remember that first blowing, we remember *ויפח באפיו נשמת חיים*. And we cry out to Hashem and say Hashem, remember us! We are *חלק אלוקה ממעל*, we are a part of You and You are a part of

us! Some of You is in each of us. But in truth, we are not just reminding Hashem, we are reminding ourselves as well; we are using the shofar as an opportunity to really remember that there is Godliness in each of us, and because of that, we are capable of greatness. We can accomplish so, so much.

Based on all this, it is really not surprising that the day Rosh Hashanah is referred to in the Torah as *יום תרועה*, *a day of blowing*, because it is the blowing itself that is so significant. However, that being said, we also know that we are instructed to use a shofar - we can't just blow, we use a shofar to blow. If you think about it, what the shofar does is it takes that breath that we blow and it turns it into beautiful sounds, moving, powerful sounds. Breath without a shofar produces no sound just like a *neschama* without a body cannot really accomplish anything.

Let's go a little deeper about where this shofar comes from. We cannot just take any horn. It specifically has to be a horn from a ram. We all know that the reason for that is because that is what Avraham used at *עקידת יצחק*. He is about to sacrifice his only child and then something catches his eye: *וישא אברהם את-עיניו וירא והנה-איל*. *אחר נאחז בסבך בקרניו*. There is a ram caught in the thicket, and he can use this ram instead of Yitzchak; this is his golden ticket. The Midrash describes that this was not just any ram. This specific ram had been created during *ששת ימי בראשית*, *during the six days of creation*, with three very specific purposes:

- The first, it would be used at *Akeidat Yitzchak*.
- The second, one of its horns would be used at *Matan Torah*.
- And the third, the other horn would be used to announce the coming of *Mashiach*.

Then the *midrash* continues to describe that this ram, this designated ram, just kept getting stuck over and over. Avraham sees it in the thicket but that was not the first time it had gotten stuck. It was a little bit of a clumsy ram and it would get stuck and then it would get unstuck, and then it would get stuck again, and every time it would extract itself it, it would find itself in a another bush, another tree, stuck again. This ram had a very clear purpose in life. It was created during Creation and designated for greatness. All it wanted to do was accomplish its goal. But so much would get stuck in its way, and just when it would get itself untangled it would get stuck again. Hashem says so beautifully to Avraham in this midrash, כך עתידין בנחל להסתבך, *so too your children are going to get stuck over and over again*. We are no different than that clumsy ram. We are given a *neschama*, we are put here for a purpose, and all we really want to do is push ourselves toward that goal; to follow our dreams, our passions and make it to the finish line. We desire to follow our *neschama* and guidelines within each of us. But sometimes we get stuck. We get lost. We get distracted. There are lots of external influences out there, many things are pulling us in different directions, and sometimes we lose sight of who we really are and we forget that there's a piece of Godliness within us.

So, on Rosh Hashanah, when we blow the shofar, we remind ourselves, not just Hashem, of who we really are. We remember that blow of years ago when G-d breathed life into each of us, and in doing so, infused us with a piece of Godliness.

I want to end with a quick story, it's one of my husband's favorite stories. He often repeats it to our children at the Shabbat table. The story is told of Rabbi Yaakov Galinsky who was living in a labor camp in Siberia. At the time, he noticed that there was another inmate there who would wake up every single night in the middle of the night, and he would go under his bed, take out

his suitcase, take out a general's uniform, put this uniform on, march a few steps, salute himself in the mirror, march a few steps back to his bed, take off his uniform, put it back under his bed and put on his prisoner garb. This would happen night after night and finally one day, Rav Yaakov went up to him and he said, "I need to ask you, what is going on, what are you doing?" And the man said, "I don't know what you are talking about." And he said, "Don't lie to me, I see you every night, getting up, getting dressed in this uniform - what are you doing?" And the man finally said, "I am a high ranking Lithuanian general. I am not a prisoner who peels potatoes, cleans toilets and scrubs the floor. So every night I get dressed in uniform to remind myself of who I really am. So even if I spend the days cleaning toilets and scrubbing floors, at the end of the day I remember that I am a high ranking official." Like the Lithuanian general, we sometimes also need to remind ourselves who we really are. We are not a clumsy ram, or a man lost in Mumbai wandering the streets for the next party. We are not prisoners scrubbing toilets. We are חלק ממעל אלוהים. There is a piece of G-d within each of us, a piece of G-d that dates back to that very first Rosh Hashanah when G-d breathed life into man, when he inspired Godliness into each of us.

My hope is that this year on Rosh Hashanah (and this year we only get one chance because the first day of Rosh Hashanah falls on Shabbat and we will only blow the shofar once) when we do blow the shofar that we can remember that blow, the purity of that day in Gan Eden, the potential of that day, and remember who we really are and let this be the year that we do not forget who we are.

## למנצח לבני קורח: Teki'at Shofar

### Mrs. Aviva Orlian

There is tension in the air on Rosh Hashanah morning as the congregation begins to recite *Tehillim, Perek 47* seven times before the piercing sounds of the shofar burst through the air.

To the conductor, a song (inspired) by the sons of Korach

Just prior to being swallowed up into the abyss after having rebelled, the sons of Korach reached the height of repentance – an appropriate preamble to the *mizmor* (psalm) said prior to *tekias shofar* on Rosh Hashanah, a day of introspection. B'nei Korach, whose descendants sang in the Beis Hamikdash declare the coronation of Hashem, the King of Kings. The overarching theme of Rosh Hashanah is to acknowledge G-d as the King. In this Psalm, the sounds of the shofar blast, the call to sing to the King on His throne and the assembly of nations under one reign, converge to paint a picture of mankind celebrating Hashem as the King of Kings. This is a Messianic vision, but like much of our liturgy and psalms, it transcends the barrier of time and traverses the past, present and future.

Throughout this *mizmor*, we see references to the sounds of the shofar, such as *tekiah* and *teruah*. In addition, peppered throughout are references to some of the reasons attributed to the blowing of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah, one of which is that the shofar calls to mind the ceremony of a royal coronation, where instruments were played, celebrations took place and the sounds of trumpets were heard.

All of the nations join their hands together (or clap hands) and shout sounds of joy to G-d in song.

כָּל־הָעַמִּים תִּקְעוּרְכָף הָרִיעוּ  
לְאֱלֹקִים בְּקוֹל רִנָּה

(הָרִיעוּ and תִּקְעוּרְכָף – certainly call to mind the sounds of *tekiah* and *teruah* of the shofar.)

We revel at the condition where we are not coerced, but we willingly accept Hashem as King. We are referring to the ideal state where it is not just the Jewish nation that accepts G-d, but it is a universal acceptance - כָּל־הָעַמִּים תִּקְעוּרְכָף – *all of the nations are joining hands*. This is a transformed United Nations that is finally full of integrity and honesty whose songs will ultimately blend with perfect harmony with our songs.

הָרִיעוּ לְאֱלֹקִים – A *teruah blast*, implying a calling out from the depths of our emotions. While this may not be referring to blowing the shofar specifically, we are creating a sound from our souls, similar to the actual blowing of the shofar. Rav Samson R. Hirsch points out that we are solemn and we stand in awe of אֱלֹקִים – the G-d of strict justice. However, tempered with that solemnity is בְּקוֹל רִנָּה – our souls rejoice in that realization with a voice of song. This is indeed the theme of this *mizmor* where our service to G-d is highlighted as being characterized by fear and trepidation on the one hand - and joy and celebration on the other.

The next verse answers the question of why it is that we should clasp hands together and shout sounds of joy?

Because G-d is on high, and is awesome, a great King over all of the land.

עֲלִינוּ נוֹרָא מֶלֶךְ גָּדוֹל  
עַל-כָּל-הָאָרֶץ כִּי ה'

Another symbolism of the shofar is referenced in this verse, where the blowing of the shofar at Hashem's coronation declares that He is the creator of the world, the completion of which took place on Rosh Hashanah – as we say in our prayers – *Hayom Haras Olam* – Today is the birth date of the world.

The Malbim points out that unlike some schools of thought which maintain that G-d created the world, but subsequently left the world to run on its own, we proclaim the opposite - מֶלֶךְ גָּדוֹל - על-כָּל-הָאָרֶץ – that G-d is the King over all of the land and has supervised it from the beginning of time. This dovetails with the theme of Rosh Hashanah as being a day of judgment on all aspects of creation.

He leads nations under us and regimes under our feet

יִדְבֵּר עַמִּים תַּחְתֵּינוּ  
וְלְאֻמִּים תַּחַת רַגְלֵינוּ

In Messianic times, we are promised that the nations will be under the auspices of the Jewish people. Rav Hirsch understands יִדְבֵּר to imply gathering together - the nations will gather together willingly and proclaim Hashem as King because they will see the integrity of the Jewish mission statement.

He will choose our heritage for us, the pride of Jacob whom He loved. Selah.

יִבְחַרְלֵנוּ אֶת-נַחֲלָתֵנוּ אֶת  
גְּאוֹן יַעֲקֹב אֲשֶׁר-אַהֲבָה סֵלָה

This verse is referencing that Hashem will choose the best location for the *Beis Hamikdash*, which is at the *makom Hamikdash* in Yerushalayim which is in the Land of Israel. This calls to mind yet another symbolism of the shofar: the shofar blast - or the horn blast of the enemy that mobilized armies to destroy the Holy Temple. As Yirmiyahu tells us:

Oh, my suffering, my suffering! How I writhe! Oh, the walls of my heart! My heart moans within me, I cannot be silent; For you have heard the sound of the shofar, oh my soul, alarms of war. (Yirmayahu 4:19).

מֵעִי | מַעֲלֵי אוֹהֵלָה  
קִירוֹת לִבִּי הִמָּה-לִּי לִבִּי  
לֹא אַחֲרִישׁ כִּי קוֹל שׁוֹפָר  
שָׁמַעְתָּ נְפְשִׁי תְרוּעַת  
מִלְחָמָה

When we hear our shofar, we pray that the day will come when we will be able to proclaim that the dreaded sound of the horn blast of our enemies will be replaced by the exciting and celebratory sounds of the shofar at the time of *Mashiach* when the third Temple will be built - *בְּמָקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר* - *in the place that Hashem will choose.* (Mussaf of Festivals).

It is noteworthy that the reference to the Land of Israel which is inserted in the middle of the *mizmor* describing the coronation of Hashem, highlights the centrality of Eretz Yisrael in the Jewish consciousness, and particularly on Rosh Hashanah. We typically do not think of Eretz Yisrael as the main focal point of the day, yet this verse and its insertion in the central part of the *mizmor* would suggest otherwise. In *Parshas Re'eh*, the Torah tells us of the characteristics of the Land of Israel.

It is a land which the L-RD your G-d looks after, on which the L-RD your G-d always keeps His eye, from year's beginning to year's end. (Devarim 11:12)

אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ  
דֹרֵשׁ אֹתָהּ תָמִיד עֵינֵי ה'  
אֱלֹקֶיךָ בְּהַ מְרֻשִׁית הַשָּׁנָה  
וְעַד אַחֲרֵית שָׁנָה

Within this verse, we see the juxtaposition of the words *מְרֻשִׁית* and *שָׁנָה*, a reference to Rosh Hashanah. These words are not used in the Torah even with reference to the holiday of Rosh Hashanah itself, yet the phrase is used in reference to Eretz Yisrael. Indeed, Ramban alerts us to the Gemarah in Rosh Hashanah that

the success of the Land of Israel is judged on Rosh Hashanah and the success of this land impacts the rest of the world. By extension then, the land of Israel indeed is a focus of Rosh Hashanah. This leads us to recall that the shofar blast reminds us of the future *kibutz galiyos* where all of the Jews who had been in exile will gather to the focal point of the world, the Land of Israel:

And on that day, a great ram's horn shall be sounded; and the strayed who are in the land of Assyria and the expelled who are in the land of Egypt shall come and worship the L-RD on the holy mount, in Jerusalem. (Yeshaya 27:13)

וְהָיָה בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יִתְקַע  
בְּשׁוֹפָר גָּדוֹל וּבָאוּ  
הַאֲבָדִים בְּאֶרֶץ אַשּׁוּר  
וְהַנִּדְחִים בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם  
וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לֵה' בְּהַר הַקֹּדֶשׁ  
בִּירוּשָׁלַם

G-d ascends in the blast, G-d with the sound of the shofar.

Another symbolism of the shofar is to recall the *teruah* blast at *Matan Torah*, which according to the Midrash is alluded to in these words. The shofar indeed is featured very prominently in the account of the *Matan Torah*:

The blare of the shofar grew in intensity. As Moses spoke, G-d answered him in a voice. (Shemos 19:19)

וַיְהִי קוֹל הַשׁוֹפָר הוֹלֵךְ  
וְחֶזֶק מְאֹד מִשֵּׁה יִדְבֵר  
וְהָאֱלֹקִים יַעֲנֶנּוּ בְּקוֹל -

Another parallel, is that the *teruah* blast of the shofar is a quick staccato burst resembling the deep emotion of anguish and fear that surfaces as we contemplate our actions and that our lives hang in the balance. The shofar evokes terror– as it says in *Sefer Amos*:

When a shofar is blown in the city, do the people not tremble? (Amos: 3:6)

אִם יִתְקַע שׁוֹפָר בְּעִיר וְעָם  
לֹא יִחְרְדוּ

Yet the emotion of fear of Hashem's *midas hadin*, as characterized by **עֵלָה אֱלֹקִים**, must be tempered with the emotion of joy, which manifests through the *midas harachamim* - as implied by **בְּקוֹל שׁוֹפָר**. To highlight the tension of the two emotions, the Midrash tells us:

In the moment when Hashem sits on the Throne of Judgment, Hashem ascends with (the attribute) of strict justice, as it says “G-d (Elokim) ascends in the blast”, and when Israel takes the shofaros in their hands and blows before G-d, He gets up from the seat of strict justice and sits on the seat of mercy, as it is written, “G-d (YKVK) in the sound of the shofar,”, He is filled with mercy for them and shows mercy on them and changes from the attribute of strict justice to that of mercy... (Vayikra Rabba: 29:3).

בְּשַׁעֲהָ שֶׁהִקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ  
הוּא יוֹשֵׁב וְעוֹלָה עַל כִּסֵּא  
דִּין, בְּדִין הוּא עוֹלָה, מֵאִי  
טַעַם, עֵלָה אֱלֹקִים  
בְּתַרְוֵעָה, וּבְשַׁעֲהָ  
שִׁישְׂרָאֵל נוֹטְלִין אֶת  
שׁוֹפְרֵיהֶן וְתוֹקְעִין לִפְנֵי  
הַקְּדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, עוֹמֵד  
מִכִּסֵּא הַדִּין וְיוֹשֵׁב בְּכִסֵּא  
רַחֲמִים, דְּכַתִּיב: ה' בְּקוֹל  
שׁוֹפָר, וּמִתְמַלֵּא עֲלֵיהֶם  
רַחֲמִים וּמְרַחֵם עֲלֵיהֶם  
וְהוֹפֵךְ עֲלֵיהֶם מִדַּת הַדִּין  
לְרַחֲמִים

The duality of the day of Rosh Hashanah is encapsulated within this *posuk*. It is a day of *din*, which engenders fear; however, the blowing of the shofar, accompanied by our intents and thoughts that we immerse into absorbing those sounds, facilitate Hashem's mercy which results in our being joyful and optimistic about the Day of Judgment.

Sing, Oh sing to G-d; sing, Oh sing to our King.

זָמְרוּ אֱלֹקִים זָמְרוּ זָמְרוּ  
לְמַלְכֵנוּ זָמְרוּ

This is a missive to call out songs of praise to G-d. Whereas we have previously seen the dual emotions that the shofar evokes – of both fear and joy - we now encounter the sense of joy that bursts forth and takes center stage. Perhaps if we follow the imagery of the above Midrash, we are celebrating Hashem shifting from the seat of *din* to the seat of *rachamim* following the shofar blast. On a *peshat* level, however, we are singing because G-d is the King – as we see from the next verse:

for G-d is King over all the earth; Sing, oh enlightened One!	כִּי מֶלֶךְ כְּלֵהָאָרֶץ אֱלֹקִים זָמְרוּ מִשְׁכִּיל -
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The singing is the result of a deep perception, and recognition (as characterized by the word *מִשְׁכִּיל*) that Hashem is the master of the universe, that leaves us feeling a tremendous sense of fulfillment

G-d reigns over the nations; G-d is seated on His holy throne	עַל־גּוֹיִם אֱלֹקִים מֶלֶךְ יָשֵׁב   עַל־כִּסֵּא אֱלֹקִים קְדוֹשׁ:
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These words highlight the shofar as representing the fear of the day when G-d sits on His throne in judgment and the shofar stirs our hearts to remind us that we are being judged.

The nobles of the peoples are gathered together, the people of the G-d of Abraham; for the protectors of the earth are G-d; He is greatly exalted.	נְדִיבֵי עַמִּים נֶאֱסָפוּ עִם אֱלֹקֵי אַבְרָהָם כִּי לְאֱלֹקִים מִגְנֵי־אָרֶץ מֵאֵד נִעְלָה
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In this last verse, we reference Avraham Avinu which highlights perhaps one of the most famous symbolisms of the shofar, that of *Akeidas Yitzchak*. It recalls the horn of the ram that Avraham Avinu sacrificed in place of his son, Yitzchak. The shofar blast reminds us, and alternatively “reminds” Hashem, of that sacrifice, and in that merit facilitates Hashem’s mercy on us. In addition, when contemplating *Akeidas Yitzchak*, we see the investment and its

return for generations to come, as the precedent for sacrifice has been passed to future generations, allowing us to infuse our service to G-d with our own *mesiras nefesh* which in turn brings Hashem to look upon us with *rachamim*.

In conclusion, the passage of “*Lamenatzeiach*” that we recite before hearing the shofar depicts the loud shofar blast and the awe and pageantry as we imagine the nations acknowledging Hashem and crowning Him as the ultimate King in Messianic times. It is also a passage that hints to the alarming sounds of the shofar: the shofar of war, the shofar of crying, the shofar of trepidation, the shofar of *din*. However, those somber sounds and emotions are balanced with the more upbeat blasts of the shofar that accompany joyous sounds of singing. This preamble to the shofar blowing demonstrates the dual emotions that pervade the day of Rosh Hashanah. We shudder at the judgment that awaits us from - **אלקים** the G-d of strict justice, yet we are full of hope and we rejoice with the knowledge that G-d is also **YKVK**– the G-d of *rachamim*.

May we merit that the shofar blast this Rosh Hashanah facilitate Hashem’s mercy on us and herald the anticipatory and exciting sounds of the ultimate, שׁוֹפָר גְּדוּלָה, that will play melodious and joyous music with the coming of Mashiach.



## Rosh Hashanah: Mussaf – Malchuyos

Mrs. Tali Pfeiffer

Towards the end of the *Malchuyos* portion of our *Musaf* on both days of Rosh Hashanah, there is a paragraph dedicated to crowning Hashem as King. We start off by saying: אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, Our G-d and G-d of our fathers, מְלֹךְ עַל כָּל הָעוֹלָם כְּלוּ בְּכַבּוֹדְךָ, reign over the entire world with Your glory. The paragraph continues with us davening that Hashem's honor and splendor should be apparent in the world so that everyone should understand that Hashem created them. We end off by saying: וַיֹּאמֶר לֵל אֲשֶׁר נְשָׁמָה, and everyone who has breath in his nostrils will say, וְקוֹק אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִלְּךָ, Hashem G-d of Israel is King, וּמַלְכוּתוֹ בְּכֹל מְשָׁלָה, and His Kingship rules over all."

Based on this paragraph, I'd like to ask two questions. First, why is it necessary for each person to make this declaration that Hashem should reign as King over the entire world? What impact does one person have on Hashem being King? Isn't it more global than that? Second, at the end of the paragraph, why do we refer to individuals as "כל אשר נשמה באפיו, everyone who has breath in his nostrils," as opposed to just using a regular word for people or individuals?

Let us begin by dealing with the first question. The *Sfas Emes* explains that when we say, "מְלֹךְ עַל כָּל הָעוֹלָם כְּלוּ בְּכַבּוֹדְךָ, reign over the entire world with your glory," the focus needs to be on crowning Hashem as King in our own lives. As the *Midrash Tanchuma* explains, each individual that is a part of *Bnei Yisrael* is an עוֹלָם בְּפִנֵי עַצְמוֹ, a world unto himself. Therefore, when we accept Hashem as King upon ourselves, this actually does have an effect on the *klal*, on the rest of the world.

Based on this idea from the *Sfas Emes*, Rav Meizlish, in his *sefer*, *Sichos Ba'avodas Hashem*, gives a fantastic *mashal*. There was a father who came home from work and had a huge pile of papers and letters to go through and organize. His young son came into the office and started to bother him and ask him lots of questions on each thing. He started, "What's this abba, what's this?" The questions continued on and on. The father saw that he wasn't going to be able to do his work this way so he thought of a good idea. There was a newspaper on his desk with a detailed map of the world on it. He ripped it into small pieces and said, "Son, put this back together like a puzzle and I will be so excited to see that you did it!" He thought for sure that he would have two to three hours of peace without his son bothering him because it would take him a long time to figure out where each country went. He felt relieved that he would finally be able to deal with everything he had to do with peace of mind. Suddenly, his son came back after five short minutes. In his hand, was the map all put together perfectly. The father couldn't believe what he was seeing and asked, "How were you able to do that?!?" The boy looked at his father with a big smile and said, "On the other side of the page there was a picture of a person and I know what a person looks like so I worked on that. I put the eyes where eyes go, the mouth where the mouth is supposed to go, arms where arms go, and legs where legs go. I continued until the person was all put together and then when I was done, I turned it over and the map of the world was also complete!" The *nimshal* here is that each person needs to work on him or herself, being the best he or she can be, crowning Hashem as king

over his or her individual life. Through this, *im yirtzeh Hashem*, the entire world will become complete as well. This explains why each person needs to coronate Hashem as King. On Rosh Hashanah, the focus is not necessarily about coronating Hashem over the whole world, it's about making Hashem as King over each of our own lives by putting Hashem at the center of our lives.

Now that we understand that, I would like to share an idea from Rav Avraham Zvi Kluger in his book, *My Soul Desire*, that answers our second question of why we use phraseology of “נשמה באנו, כל אשר, ונשמה באנו” everyone who has breath in his nostrils.” Rav Kluger explains that in Bereishis 2:7 we are told:

The L-RD G-d formed man from the dust of the earth. He blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.

וַיִּצְרֵהוּ יְקֹנֵק אֱלֹקִים אֶת־הָאָדָם עֹפָר מִן־הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו  
נְשָׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה

Hashem created us by blowing a *neshama* into us. On Rosh Hashanah, we hint to this language of creation and say to Hashem, “You gave me my *neshama* and now I am going to channel that original *neshama* that You gave me to serve You. You created me with Your breath, and now, every breath that I take is for You.” When we blow the shofar on Rosh Hashanah, we are expressing the same idea. We use our breath and blow it back to Hashem as an expression of coronating Hashem as King over our personal lives, and in turn, over the entire world. Please G-d, with this in mind, we will be able to enhance our tefillah on Rosh Hashanah and set ourselves up for a year of success with Hashem as our King.

# Rosh Hashanah: Mussaf Zichronot

Mrs. Zemira Ozarowski

After finishing the section of *Malchuyot* in which we coronate Hashem as King, we now begin the section of Zichronot. Since we now just coronated Hashem as our King, we must now answer to Him. Today is a day of judgement and so we need to plead our case before the Master Judge. How do we do that? With *Zichronot* - with memories. The Gemara Rosh Hashanah says – אמרו לפני...זכרונות. כדי שיעלה זכרוניהם לפני " – לטובה" Hashem is now ready to hear what we have to say. We need to bring before Him a litany of memories and cause Hashem to remember why we deserve to be judged favorably. The Gemara tells us that we are not allowed to bring any negative memories in this section. We need to be positive because if we are trying to convince Hashem to acquit us, we need to first prove to ourselves that we have a good case.

Rav Avigdor Nevensal writes that it is important that we explain what we mean by memory. Obviously, Hashem does not forget and then need to remember things, and we do not need to remind Him of anything. We are using a פועל מושאל a borrowed term, just like when we say Hashem loves or hates something or someone. We need to use words we can understand from our own lives to try and understand Hashem in whatever human ways we have at our disposal.

The point of the exercise is not really to remind Hashem because He forgot. It is more to give us the opportunity to analyze our own actions and history as individuals and as a nation. In doing that, we bring ourselves much closer to where Hashem wants us to be. The very exercise is cleansing. Rav Shlomo Wolbe writes:

Analyzing one's actions and revealing one's true self is what makes man complete

בירור המעשים וגילוי אמיתת עצמו הם השלמת האדם עצמו.

According to how much a person has connected to this concept of zichronot, of analyzing his past history, that is how his actions will be measured

לפי קירבתו של אדם ל"זכרונות" נמדדים מעשיו.

This is because a person with zichronot and a person without zichronot (a person who self-analyzes and a person who does not) are completely different in their essence

הרי אדם עם "זכרונות" ואדם בלי "זכרונות" שונים הם זה מזה במהותם...ומה רב ההבדל ביניהם

We reach totally different level of self-awareness by going through this process.

The section of *Zichronot* really has two themes – the individual and the nation. We are pleading our case on two levels here and we need to *daven* just as much for ourselves as individuals as we do as one collective nation. The first level that we focus on is the personal level.

We begin with a very moving paragraph. Personally, this is one of the most moving sections of the whole Rosh Hashanah davening. We make a statement reminding ourselves of Hashem's intense *Hashgacha Pratit*, Divine Providence, and how much He is involved and knows about every single detail of our lives. The author of the *Yesod v'Shores Ha'Avodah* writes

כל מי, שנגע יראת ה בלבו אפילו במקצת יתן את that  
 לבו בבכי רב יעצום, anyone who has even the  
 slightest amount of Yirat Hashem in his heart will  
 begin pouring out his heart in tears when he says  
 this paragraph.

אתה זוכר מעשה עולם ופוקד כל יצורי קדם. לפניך  
 נגלו כל תעלומות והמון נסתרות שמבראשית. כי  
 אין שכחה לפני כסא כבודך ואין נסתר מנגד עיניך:  
 אתה זוכר את כל המפעל. וגם כל היצור לא נכחד  
 ממך: הכל גלוי וידוע לפניך יהוה אלהינו, צופה  
 ומביט עד סוף כל הדורות. כי תביא חוק זכרון  
 להפקד כל רוח ונפש. להזכר מעשים רבים והמון  
 בריות לאין תכלית: מראשית כזאת הודעת,  
 ומלפנים אותה גלית. זה היום תחלת מעשיך, זכרון  
 ליום ראשון. כי חוק לישראל הוא משפט לאלהי  
 יעקב:

אתה זוכר מעשה עולם:

Hashem remembers every single action that  
 ever occurred in the world, and for Him it is as if  
 all of these actions occurred all at the same  
 time. Past, present, and future are all blended  
 together into one. As human beings, things that  
 happen in the past no longer exist. Our  
 memories fade and it's as if they never  
 happened. Not so for Hashem.

ופוקד כל יצורי קדם:

He judges all of mankind from all time every Rosh  
 Hashanah.

He is dealing with everything all at the same  
 time. But as much as He is running the entire  
 world, from one end to the other, from the  
 beginning of time until the end of time, all at the  
 same time, He is also uniquely concerned with  
 every single individual. We all know this  
 intellectually, but we get so caught up in our lives  
 that we sometimes forget. This bracha helps us  
 to remember.

לפניך נגלו כל תעלומות:

All puzzles and enigmas are revealed to You.  
 There are a lot of things about our own selves  
 that we do not understand. Sometimes we feel  
 something or do something and when we  
 analyze it afterwards, we really do not know  
 why we did that action. It may be based on an  
 insecurity, a distant memory, a trauma, but it is  
 in our subconscious. We also do not know about

all of the hidden potential inside us, that is  
 something only Hashem can know.

כי אין שכחה לפני כסא כבודך

Because Hashem does not forget anything. He  
 does not forget the generations that lived  
 before us and He takes that all into account  
 when He judges us. We are not judged as  
 individual beings but rather in light of how we  
 were impacted by history, by past events, by  
 our parents, our ancestors, and everything that  
 influenced our development.

As time passes, we forget our sin. We tend to  
 think what we do not remember. It is as if it  
 never happened and that Hashem probably also  
 forgot. This comes to uproot this mistaken  
 philosophy. Hashem never forgets and He does  
 not remember in a very vague way. No, this  
 bracha reminds us that Hashem remembers  
 every single detail, the good and the bad, there  
 is *schar v'onesh*. There is accountability and this  
 will hopefully help us to be more careful with  
 our actions. This is not just on the negative side.  
 Hashem also remembers every single detail of  
 all of the good we have ever done. He  
 remembers everything - even *mitzvot* that we  
 have long forgotten, the seemingly unimportant  
 mitzvot, or even just positive thoughts that we  
 have had.

ואין נסתר מנגד עיניך:

Nothing is hidden from before Hashem's eyes.  
 Rav Soloveitchik in *Noraot HaRav* writes that  
 this refers to future generations. We are also  
 judged based on the impact that our actions will  
 have on future generations. We are a link in a  
 chain and therefore cannot be judged just as an  
 individual but on the before and after.

אתה זוכר את כל המפעל. וגם כל היצור לא נכחד ממך:

Hashem remembers both the big picture כל  
 the whole of the creation, the entire  
 cosmic process, as well as each unique  
 creature, each person as an individual.

הכל גלוי וידוע לפניך יהוה אלהינו, צופה ומביט עד  
 סוף כל הדורות

When Hashem judges, He can look at the entire picture, spanning all generations, and understanding the background of where we come from, and the impact, both good and bad, that we will have on future generations throughout history.

וְעַל הַמִּדִּינֹת בּוֹ יֵאמַר אֵיזוֹ לַחֲרָב, וְאֵיזוֹ לְשָׁלוֹם, אֵיזוֹ לְרָעָב, וְאֵיזוֹ לְשִׁבְעָה, וּבְרִיּוֹת בּוֹ יִפְקְדוּ לְהַזְכִּירָם לְחַיִּים וְלַמָּוֹת

Here we mention the second level, the national level - every single nation is being judged today for their actions. And based on an analysis of how we have acted as a nation, we will be judged whether the nation will need to go to war or will have peace, whether we will have a famine, or have a plague, and what will be the destiny of the nation for the coming year.

We continue discussing the individual level:

מִי לֹא נִפְקְדָה כְּהַיּוֹם הַזֶּה. כִּי זָכַר כָּל הַיְצוֹר לְפָנָיו בָּא:

Who is not remembered on this day? The memory of each creation is brought before you.

מִעֲשֵׂה אִישׁ וּפְקֻדָּתוֹ וְעֲלִילוֹת מִצְעָדֵי גֵבֶר:

We are being judged not only for our *ma'asim*, our actions, but for our *pekuda*. What does this word mean? Rabbi Frand explains that the word *pekuda* means our life circumstances, and it is also connected to the word *tafkid* which means our life mission. Each person has a specific mission in life and they are given certain life conditions in order to be able to fulfill that *tafkid*. Therefore, we cannot be judged solely based on actions, but on what family we were born into, what school we went to, what talents and abilities we were given and based on that, we will be judged. This is very different than a regular court where people are judged just on the hard and dry facts. Here, Hashem looks beneath the surface at who we are as people and only then can He make a judgement.

Rabbi Frand goes on to say – after 120 years, we will not be judged why we were not like Moshe Rabbeinu but we *will* be held accountable based

on our potential – why did we not become the best we could be?

Rabbi Frand tells a fascinating story about the Netziv. The Netziv, Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin, lived in Lithuania less than two hundred years ago. He was Rosh Yeshiva of the Yeshiva of Volozhin and wrote a commentary on Torah and Neviim. When he finished writing his sefer the *Ha'emek Shayla*, he called together his friends for a special celebration. He told them the following story, "When I was a kid, I was a terrible student. I never paid attention, I was lazy and did not want to concentrate. One day, I came home from school and heard my parents talking. They decided that there was no point in keeping me in *cheder* any longer and that they would send me to be an apprentice to a shoemaker. I was so shocked by what I had overheard that I ran to my parents and begged them to give me a second chance. And from that day onward, I pushed myself to work really hard and to study." Then the Netziv continued, "But just imagine what would have happened had I not overheard my parents' conversation. I'd probably have ended up as a shoemaker. And I would have been a good man, I would have been honest in business, and I would have davened every day and made time for learning. But think of what would have happened when I would have come up to *shamayim* after 120 years. The *beit din shel maalah* would have said to me, "Naftali, show us what you've done with your life." And I'd proudly show them my beautiful shoes and tell them how honest I had been in business. And then they'd ask me, 'But Naftali, where are all the *sefarim* you were supposed to write? Where are your 10,000 students?' and I would have nothing to answer!"

And so these words *מעשה איש ופקודותיו* charge us to take a deep look into ourselves and to make sure that we are truly fulfilling our potential and accomplishing what we each need to accomplish.

We go on and say that a person is also judged based on *מִחֲשַׁבּוֹת אָדָם וְתַהֲבוּלוֹתָיו*, not only for his actions but even for his thoughts. We know that one of the ten commandments is not to be jealous. The Ibn Ezra asks how can one be commanded how to feel? And his answer is that yes, indeed. We do need to find a way to control our thoughts. We are responsible for our inner feelings and can be punished or rewarded for them, even if they never translate into actions.

This section ends off with the words:

וְאַתָּה דוֹרֵשׁ מַעֲשֵׂה כָלֶם:

Hashem analyzes the deeds of all. Here we begin our second theme. Rav Soloveitchik (The Rav volume 2) used to say that Rosh Hashanah is a day in which Hashem not only judges the individual. but the community as a whole. The Jewish community as a whole needs to analyze the events of the year and do *teshuva* as a community for what the collective community has done wrong.

We then move on to the ten *pesukim* about *Zichronot*. These *pesukim* were not chosen randomly. There are hundreds, if not thousands of places where the root, לזכור, to remember, is used. The fact that Chazal chose these specific ten places is obviously significant.

In the interest of time, we will not go through all of them. But as you read them, you should keep in mind that each of these *pesukim* is here to teach us something different about *zichronot*. Almost all of them focus on the second part of the theme – the nation. We emphasize the national memory and the strong binding relationship and covenant we have with *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*. On this level, we are trying to remind Hashem of the *brit* He has with us as a nation so that He will forgive us and grant us a good year as a nation because of this *brit* and because of *zchut avot*.

We also need to show Hashem that we, as a nation, are deserving of this forgiveness. We are following in the footsteps of our forefathers and therefore should be included in this *brit*. The way that we do this is by showing Hashem all of

the merits of *Bnei Yisrael* in the past, as well as all of the merits of the Jewish people today. We need to prepare for this. We are about to enter into a courtroom and need to have our arguments prepared. What can we say to defend the Jewish people? It is our job to come forward and remind Hashem of all of the good memories, even though Hashem of course knows all of them. In this way, when Hashem sees how earnestly we believe in the *zchuyot* of the Jewish people, He will be able to judge us favorably.

When we look at Jewish history, we can look back at a long line of people who were *moser nefesh* for Hashem: Avraham at *Akeidat Yitzchak*, Yaakov who experienced so much suffering but never questioned Hashem's ways, the Crusades, the exiles from many different countries, the Inquisition, many cruel leaders, and the Holocaust. Even today, things are not simple. We are dealing with war, terrorist attacks, and anti-Semitism. We easily could have given up in any given generation and converted to whatever was the leading religion at the time, but we did not. We preferred to be *moser nefesh*, to suffer or to even give up our lives *al kiddush Hashem*. So we can say to Hashem look at us, look at our *zchuyot*, You need to judge us favorably as a nation and grant us a good year as a nation. Yes, there are problems and maybe there is a lot of assimilation and the leadership is not great, and there is a lot of corruption and immorality, but look at our background. The last time we heard *nevua* was thousands of years ago. We do not have a *Bet Hamidkash*; we do not have the presence of the *Shechina*; we do not have strong Jewish religious leadership, and yet we continue on and do the best we can. Look at how many *yeshivot* we have and how big the *teshuva* moment is. We are putting our best foot forward!

We go through the *pesukim* and we talk about Noach and how Hashem remembered him and saved him in the *teiva*, וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת נֹחַ, וְאֵת כָּל הַבְּהֵמָה, אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ בַּתֵּיבָה. Rashi says that the reason Hashem remembered him was because of the kindness that he showed to all of the animals on the *teiva*, feeding them 24 hours

a day. We need to think as we are saying this about all the times throughout Jewish history until today. We as a nation have looked out for each other and taken care of everyone's needs.

We continue and talk about how Hashem heard our *tefillot* and remembered us in *Mitzrayim* and redeemed us.

וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים אֶת נַאֲקָתְכֶם, וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת בְּרִיתוֹ, אֶת יַעֲקֹב, וְאֶת אֶת בְּרִיתוֹ יִצְחָק, וְאֶת יִצְחָק וְאֶת יַעֲקֹב. Again we need to focus on all of the nation's *tefillot* throughout the generations and ask Hashem to give us a good judgement based on that.

Next, we bring in *zchot avot*, זְכַרְתִּי אֶת בְּרִיתִי יַעֲקֹב, וְאֶת אֶת בְּרִיתִי יִצְחָק, וְאֶת אֶת בְּרִיתִי אַבְרָהָם אֶזְכֹּר and we ask Hashem to judge us favorably in the merit of our forefathers.

And so on and so forth. In each *pasuk* we bring in a different aspect of *Zichronot* and ask Hashem to remember us and forgive.

We also ask Hashem to remember us as we were in our youth. We quote a *pasuk* from Sefer Yirmiyahu, כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה זְכַרְתִּי לְךָ חֶסֶד נְעוּרַיִךְ, אֶהְבֵּת כְּלוּלוֹתַיִךְ, לְכַתֹּף אַחֲרַי בַּמִּדְבָּר, בְּאַרְץ לֹא זְרוּעָה. This *pasuk* refers to the fact that Hashem remembers the *chessed* of our youth, when we left *Mitzrayim* and followed Him into the desert. This *pasuk* seems to be out of place in its context. It is found in the middle of the terrible *tochacha* - rebuke - when the decree was already sealed for the *churban* and Yirmiyahu was telling them of the things that will happen because of their actions. And yet right in the middle is this *pasuk* of comfort. But the message is that no matter what, no matter how much we mess up, Hashem will always love us and will always be able to find the positive.

Near the end, we get to another famous *pasuk* in Yirmiyahu:

Truly, Ephraim is a dear son to Me, A child that is dandled! Whenever I have turned against him, My thoughts would dwell on him still. That is why My heart yearns for him; I will receive him back in love —declares the L-RD.

נֹאמַר הַבֵּן יִקִּיר לִי אֶפְרַיִם, אִם יֵלֵד שְׁעִשׂוּעִים, כִּי מֵדֵי דַבְּרֵי בּו זְכוֹר אֶזְכְּרֶנּוּ עוֹד, עַל כֵּן הֵמוּ מֵעַי לוֹ, רַחֵם אֶרְחַמֶנּוּ נְאֻם ה'.

In this *pasuk*, Hashem relates to us as a precious and delightful young child, even today. Hashem relates to us in the present, as if we were still young. Rav Soloveitchik writes that while the previous *pasuk* is like the love of a father, whose love is aroused for his adult child when he remembers him as a baby. Here, Hashem displays the love of a mother who will always view her grown children as her babies, even when they are adults. Hashem takes the role of both parents, loving us despite all that we have been through and how far we might have sunk. He can look back at our youth, at our exuberance and excitement as a new nation, and focus on that. And we *daven* to Hashem to continue to look at us like a sweet little baby and remember that we are the ones who are giving Him *nachat* and continue to follow His *mitzvot* for thousands of years.

We conclude this section with

אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, זְכַרְנוּ בְּזִכְרוֹן טוֹב לְפָנֶיךָ, וּפְקֻדָּנוּ בְּפֻקְדֹת יְשׁוּעָה וְרַחֲמִים מִשְׁמֵי קֶדֶם, וּזְכַר לָנוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֶת הַבְּרִית וְאֶת הַחֶסֶד וְאֶת הַשְּׂבוּעָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ לְאַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ בְּהַר הַמֹּרִיָּה. וְתִרְאֶה לְפָנֶיךָ עֲקֵדָה שְׁעָקַד אַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ אֶת יִצְחָק בְּנוֹ עַל גְּבִי הַמִּזְבֵּחַ...

We ask Hashem to please look at *Akeidat Yitzchak* and think about how much Avraham was willing to sacrifice for Hashem and realize that we are following in his footsteps. We may not be sacrificing our sons, but we are *moser nefesh* every day to serve Hashem properly. Even

when it is not convenient and does not fit in with our modern lifestyles and it is difficult, we are ready to sacrifice and therefore, we ask Hashem to have mercy on us and to forgive us for anything we have done wrong.

כי זֹכֵר כָּל הַנְּשָׁכָחוֹת אֶתְּהָ הוּא מְעוֹלָם, וְאִין שְׂכָחָה לִפְנֵי  
כֶּסֶף כְּבוֹדָד, וְעִקְדָת יִצְחָק, לְזַרְעוֹ (שֶׁל יַעֲקֹב) הַיּוֹם  
בְּרַחֲמִים תִּזְכֹּר. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, זֹכֵר הַבְּרִית:

In the merit of our forefather Avraham and in our own merits, please remember your *brit* with us and grant us a good year both as individuals and a nation. The hope here is that after having gone through this internal introspection process of *Zichronot*, Hashem will look at us on a different level. This, coupled with all the arguments we gave on behalf of the nation, will seal our individual and collective fate in the book of life and success and all good things *b'ezrat Hashem*.



## Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur: Mussaf Piyutim Part 1: *Unesaneh Tokef* Rebbetzin Tzipora Weinberg

There have been many topics and texts that I have been privileged to learn and share over the years, from the weeping of Yirmiyahu to the pangs of Iyov, from the song of Chana to the testament of Moshe our greatest teacher. Still, now my heart drops as never before as I approach this, the apex of the *tefillos* of *kehillos Ashkenaz* on Yamim Nora'im: The prayer of Unesaneh Tokef.

And as I share these words with you now, resounding in the foreground of my mind the holy *nusach* of the *tefillah* and the sound of it as the days approach, I am in equal measure filled with gratitude for this legacy of ours, that allows us to experience the meaning of these days of awe in their depth and power in a way that binds us all together, uplifting us all in unity, forever.

Unesaneh Tokef is a *tefillah* that is recited on the two days of Rosh Hashanah and on Yom Kippur during the *chazaras hashatz* (chazzan's repetition) of Mussaf. It is the *tefillah*, the prayer, that is directly conducive to the *kedusha* of *keser*, to the coronation of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* (G-d) as *Melech Malchei Hamlachim*, King of Kings, fulfilling the charge that is ours alone on these, the holiest of days. It is the one prayer that we all anticipate, replete with the message of how miniscule, how negligible humankind is in the face of judgement.

In our tradition, as written in the medieval *Sefer Ohr Zarua*, one of the most important works of Ashkenazic halacha by Rabbi Yitzchak of Vienna, we learn that the composer of this *tefillah* was a man named Rabbi Amnon of Mainz, the *gadol hador*, venerated elder of his time. Rabbi Amnon is a figure cloaked in mystery; beyond this reference, there is nothing known to us about him. But we do know that he was a man of such stature and talent that the archbishop of Mainz

engaged in a constant campaign to affect his conversion to Christianity. Time after time, he pressured Rabbi Amnon to convert, and time after time, Rabbi Amnon refused. Until one day, when Rabbi Amnon was pushed to the point where, to stem the stream of pressure exerted against him, he said-- give me three days to think about it.

The archbishop then left him. But immediately Rabbi Amnon was filled with regret. How could he have suggested, with his response – how could he have even implied – that he would consider conversion, to deny his essential self, his Judaism? When three days elapsed spent in repentance in prayer, still he stayed away, even when summoned. The archbishop then sent for Rabbi Amnon to be brought before him in chains and asked- where were you? Why didn't you come? And Rabbi Amnon said – because I answered you the way that I did, I declare my own punishment – that you cut out my tongue that spoke those words to you. The archbishop denied that his iniquity lay in his speech, but rather in his delay in approaching, and ordered his limbs to be severed and his body to be tortured, causing him unspeakable pain and suffering. And with the advent of Rosh Hashanah, Rabbi Amnon asked to be brought to shul where his bed was placed near the *aron kodesh*, near the *chazan*, and before Kedushah he requested the opportunity to address the gathered crowd. And then! He verbalized this prayer, the poem of Unesaneh Tokef, in which he described the proceedings on high, and the magnitude of the day of judgment. Immediately thereafter, his soul was returned to heaven.

Three days later, he appeared to Rabenu Klonymous ben Meshulam in a dream, and instructed him that this prayer be established as

a part of the liturgy of Yamim Nora'im, the Days of Awe, for all Jews from that year forward.

This is a dramatic story, but it is not only the story of one righteous man and his celestial vision. Looking and listening a bit closer, let us appreciate just how universal a predicament it describes. There are many people who are uncertain as to their identity among nations, among faiths. There are many who vacillate, who are unclear how and why Judaism is relevant to them. And while of course we are talking about a tremendous *tzadik*, Rabbi Amnon's fateful moment happened when a word fell from his lips that reflected a hesitation, a consideration of another possibility, a flash of confusion. Who am I in this world? What is my purpose? How connected am I to my Judaism? How thoroughly and unequivocally certain am I in my Jewish identity as I contend with the problems that surround me?

But then there is one occasion in our year that everyone is recruited, all Jewish souls are enlisted to accountability, to pledge allegiance of heart and mind and pronounce that there are no doubts. While our daily lives might contain instances of uncertainty even up until the Day of Judgment, on Rosh Hashanah we join in reciting Unesaneh Tokef! We will proclaim, we will relate the strength, the holiness of this day! And of *Hashem Elokenu*:

on this day, your sovereignty is supreme	ובו תנשא מלכותיך
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You are the one who sits upon the throne of judgement that is upheld in empathy.	ויכון בחסד כסאך
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In truth, You know all, You remember everything. There is no pomp or circumstance, the airs or pageantry necessary when one needs to be convinced of elemental value. But here? NOT EVEN AN ECHO- *vekol demama daka yishama* - the judgement is rendered in stillness, in silence- *um'elev yikarei*, it emerges, as it were,

practically on its own. In equal measure, we need no further proofs of Hashem's majesty, just as Eliyahu Hanavi proclaimed on Har HaCarmel, our G-d is the one true King, and in this temporal space, this singularly sacred circumstance, it is evident for all to see.

Indeed, Rabbi Amnon's name reflects his role as a teacher of *emunah*, of belief in the power of this opportunity when we have the ability to recognize that we are completely at his disposal. Our lives and our destiny are in the hands of Hashem, so clearly and completely. It is this realization we need to access right before we proclaim *keser*, the reason we are all here, to stand before Him because of our certainty that He is the only king.

Unesaneh Tokef encapsulates that vulnerability- the decision of *mi yichye, umi yamus*- who will live, who will die; This is the recognition! When have we been more poised to understand this than now, as humanity stood helpless this past year, suspended, with hospitals and doctors completely at a loss, that we have no control at all. There is nothing **we** can do; we are completely dependent on Him.

Then, in the blink of an eye, as we continue in our prayer once we set the power where it belongs, we learn that there is something we CAN do. Hashem gives us the ability to transform our destiny- on that very day as we proclaim His unmitigated authority, we state:

ותשובה ותפילה וצדקה מעבירין את רוע הגזרה

*Teshuvah- the possibility that we can change ourselves from within;*

*Tefillah- the recognition that all that we have is from Him- the expression of our connection to G-d, and*

*Tzekadah- the responsibility we have to care for others in this world.*

My engagement in these activities can avert evil decrees.

This stark and sudden shift to agency is an emotional reframing of fear to hope. And once our stance shifts to action, the frightening aspects of *din*, of judgement, are cloaked in *chesed*, in compassionate understanding:

a person is basically an earthy creature	אדם יסודו מעפר
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because You are our Creator, You understand us, in all our frailties	כי אתה הוא יוצרם ואתה יודע יצרם
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Now, with all of this, we recognize our powerlessness and yet with the power You have imbued within us. We are now ready to proclaim Your kingship.

The present Slonimer Rebbe trains his focus on a key phrase within the prayer:

Hashem is likened to a shepherd, who passes each of his sheep beneath his staff, and we are His flock.	כבקרת רועה עדרו מעביר צאנו תחת שבטו
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He explains that on Rosh Hashanah, all the souls that ever did and ever will inhabit the Earth come before Hashem, from the days of Adam and of

Noach, up until today and into the future. What significance can one mortal soul attain amidst them all? How could one person's life, one person's humble prayer, mean anything in light of all the multitudes that surround Him? Yet, concerned and attuned as a shepherd to his charges, Hashem watches each and every one of us:

counting, and supporting, and remembering every living soul	כן תעביר ותספור ותמנה ותפקוד נפש כל חי
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*Veyikon bechesed kisecha*. There is no *din* that happens without *chesed*.

So this moment is a call to arms for each and every Jew. There is no difference or separation, whether man, woman; young or old; whether fervent and devout or spiritually, emotionally remote and outlying; whether we are at home or in a formal house of prayer. It is a time that each and every one of us counts in our stance before G-d. We all participate in this acceptance of judgement and in the glory of his coronation.

May we all be inscribed in the book of good life. *L'shana tova tikasevna v'sechasemna l'alter l'chaim*.

# Rosh Hashanah and Yomi Kippur: Mussaf Piyutim

## V'Chol Ma'aminim

Rebbetzin Racheli Taubes

We say the *piyyut* of *V'chol ma'aminim* during *chazarat hashatz*, when the chazzan repeats the Shmoneh Esrei of Mussaf on Rosh Hashanah. This is the very first *piyyut* after Kedusha.

The refrain of this *piyyut* is "*V'chol ma'aminim* -- All believe." We constantly state throughout this song that we believe in Hashem. We describe Him as all-knowing, as powerful, as ever-lasting, as just, etc.

This *piyyut* has a double alphabetical structure. Every two lines include the same letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The first line of each verse begins with the letter "ה" the definite article, in which we make a statement saying, "The One who..." For example the first statement is "The One who grasps the Attribute of Justice." And further in the poem the line says, "The One who redeems from death and delivers from *gehenom*," and a few lines down it says, "the One who knows the inclination of all creatures."

The second line of each verse begins with the phrase "*V'chol ma'aminim*" -All believe that He..." For example, a full statement is, "All believe that He is the G-d of faithfulness;" "All believe that he examines thoughts;" and "All believe that he is good to all." This *piyyut* is typically sung in responsive format - the chazzan loudly says the first line and the congregation says the refrain "*V'chol maaminim*."

Rabbi Hershel Schachter reports that Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, would not recite any *piyyutim* during Rosh Hashanah services-- except for this prayer, *V'chol Ma'aminim*. What a powerful prayer this must be! In fact, It is one of the oldest liturgical poems we have, dating to

the times of the Geonim (approximately 500-1000 CE).

What does this *piyyut* of *V'chol Ma'aminim*, in which we state our beliefs, have to do with Rosh Hashanah? On Rosh Hashanah, the theme of the day is *malchus*, the coronation of Hashem as our King. What does establishing Hashem's reign as our King and King of the world have to do with this poem where we sing about our beliefs?

Belief is strongly tied to knowledge and in fact, stems from knowledge. In *Sefer Bamidbar* Chapter 20, the Jewish people cry to and fight with Moshe Rabbeinu and Aharon HaKohen because they are dying of thirst and need water in the wilderness. Moshe and Aharon turn to Hashem, who responds that they should speak to a rock and it will give forth water. Moshe and Aharon gather the people, and the end of this story is well-known: Moshe instead, lifts his staff and hits the rock twice and water flows from it. Immediately Hashem speaks to Moshe and Aharon and says:

Because you did not trust Me enough to affirm My sanctity in the sight of the Israelite people, therefore you shall not lead this congregation into the land that I have given them" (Numbers 20:12).

עַן לֹא־הֶאֱמַנְתֶּם בִּי  
לְהַקְדִּישְׁנִי לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי  
יִשְׂרָאֵל לְכֹן לֹא תְבִיאֹוּ  
אֶת־הַקֶּתֶל הַזֶּה אֶל־  
הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־נָתַתִּי לָהֶם:

This verse has many commentaries trying to decipher what Hashem actually meant, why He was so upset by this, why Moshe and Aharon were unable to enter Eretz Yisrael because of this, etc. I would like to highlight the phrase

within the verse “you [did not] trust—הֲאִמַּנְתֶּם.” Hashem tells them “you didn’t believe in Me!” Rabbeinu Chananel points out that Moshe and Aharon’s mistake was that they told the Jewish people “listen up, from this rock you will get water” and they did not say, (which they should have said) “Hashem will bring forth water from this rock. They should have given the people the knowledge that Hashem is the one who is behind this action and behind this miracle. This is similar to the previous chapters when the Jewish people complained about the lack of food and Hashem brought down the quails for them to eat. Moshe and Aharon said “Hashem will give you meat.” In that case they publicly announced that Hashem was bringing this miraculous bounty of fresh meat. But in this scene in Chapter 20, known as *Mei Meriva* (bitter waters), Moshe and Aharon did not publicly acknowledge Hashem. *Emunah* is about that public acknowledgement.

Furthermore, Hashem continues to speak and does not simply say “you didn’t have faith in Me, you didn’t acknowledge Me.” He says “לֹא לְאִמַּנְתֶּם בִּי לְהַקְדִּישׁ אֶת שְׁמִי לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל” meaning, “you did not have faith in me to sanctify my name in the sight of the Jewish people.” In this verse we see the direct connection and relationship between faith and publicly sanctifying Hashem’s name. Acknowledging Hashem and publicly having faith in Hashem is how we sanctify His name.

And this is what we are doing in the *piyyut* of *V’chol Ma’aminim*. We are listing statement after statement that we are believers, and what we believe in. In this way we are sanctifying Hashem’s name through this prayer. And what better day to do this, than on Rosh Hashanah, the day when Hashem is being proclaimed as our King!

In the first chapter of *Sefer Emunah V’Bitachon*, the Chazon Ish, Rabbi Avraham Yeshayahu Karelitz, writes on *emunah* (faith) and discusses the human body. He describes how each of our

limbs and body parts serve a wonderful and wondrous purpose and enable us to be human. He writes that that is what *emunah* is about - recognizing what we have, how we are created, and how Hashem created us. It is the knowledge of the human body, even on a superficial level, that gives us the source and foundation of faith in Hashem. The Chazon Ish continues, “*emunah* is the general approach of the believing person and *bitachon*/trust is the person’s approach to himself, with faith being the theory and trust being the practice.” What the Chazon Ish describes is exactly what we are doing when we sing the prayer of *v’chol ma’aminim*. We are stating the theories of faith, and this is an essential part of the proclamation of the day.

Within the Rosh Hashanah Mussaf prayer service there are three sections: *Malchuyot*, *Zichronot*, and *Shofrot*. Each section has prayers and Biblical verses related to that theme. The *piyyut V’chol Ma’aminim* is placed in the *Malchuyot* section of Shmoneh Esrei. This is a fitting location because we accept Hashem as king by stating and proclaiming our *emunah* and faith in Him and all of His attributes. For example, we state, “We believe He is the G-d of faithfulness who probes and examines hidden archives,” “Hashem is the sole judge and that He is the true judge;” “He is patient and we believe He forgives.”

There is a rabbinic expression “אין מלך בלא עם--there is no king without a people.” We illustrate this during the recital of this *piyyut*. We are stating we are His people and we believe in Him and the attributes that we state. As mentioned earlier, this *piyyut* is said responsively. The chazzan initiates a phrase, and the congregation recites the statement “*V’chol ma’aminim*,” which the chazzan then repeats. This *piyyut* is written in a way that the chazzan’s statement prompts the congregation to complete the phrase and initiate a new phrase, and then the chazzan responds before initiating another new phrase. Thus, even the way we sing the *piyyut* unites us. We sing this *piyyut* as a nation

together because “אין מלך בלא עם-- *there is no king without a people.*” As a nation together we proclaim and coronate Hashem by stating our belief in Him in this liturgical poem.

To contrast, consider the formulation of the Rambam’s Thirteen Foundations of Belief that some have the custom to recite at the end of praying on a daily basis during the year. They are just stating the fundamental beliefs in Judaism as a creed. We state “I believe that Moshiach is coming;” “I believe that Hashem is everlasting;” “I believe that Hashem created everything.” The

purpose of those statements is to remind the one praying what they believe in.

This is very different than the *piyyut V’chol Ma’aminim* we say on Rosh Hashanah. In this *piyyut* we are stating our belief in G-d and His greatness through a description of His characteristics as we know them. In essence we are saying on a personal level, “Hashem, we accept You as King because we acknowledge what characteristics define You.” Through reciting a long list of our beliefs in Hashem’s greatness on Rosh Hashanah we are ultimately accepting Him as King to judge us on the *Yom HaDin*.

# Yom Kippur: Kol Nidrei:

## Why New Year's Resolutions Fail:

### Kol Nidrei Unlocked

Mrs. Tal Attia

Yom Kippur begins with great enigma. As we usher in the holiest day on the Jewish calendar, we commence with what is perhaps one of the most controversial prayers in Jewish liturgy, the Kol Nidrei. Literally meaning “all vows,” Kol Nidrei is actually not a prayer at all – it is a declaration. It is a legal formula that annuls vows and the verbal commitments commonly made over the course of the year. We ask for all sorts of commitments to be released.

All vows, and things we  
have made forbidden  
on ourselves, and  
oaths...

כָּל נִדְרֵי, וְאָסְרֵי, וְשְׁבוּעֵי... |

For those of us who have prayed through many a Yom Kippur, we might not even question this statement. Of course, as we head into a day of atonement, repentance, we must clear the air and clean our slate of the myriad of broken promises and unresolved commitments.

But if you break out of the “[Lullaby Effect](#),” if you allow yourself to think critically and indulge yourself in curiosity, you might find yourself faced with questions screaming to be asked. As for me, I was forced to question my assumptions when I learned a piece by Rav David Brofsky, “Kol Nidrei and the Repentance of Yom Kippur.” After reading it, I found myself questioning Kol Nidrei anew. After listing all sorts of promises, before discussing the notion of absolving them, Kol Nidrei states:

from this Yom Kippur  
until next Yom Kippur

מִיּוֹם כְּפוּרִים זֶה עַד יוֹם  
כְּפוּרִים הַבָּא |

With these words, there is a shift. Suddenly the words are not reflective, but future oriented! May our future vows be *preemptively* absolved. This is troubling - why the future tense? How can we start the year with the mindset that our promises of tomorrow mean nothing?

From a sociological and psychological standpoint, keeping promises is a basic tenet of wellbeing. Commitment is a mechanism that fosters trust and cooperation between people. It helps us create bonds with one another. Studies show that broken promises affect not only our trust in each other, but can impact the promise-breaker as well, even threatening his or her sense of self-worth and identity.

And what is more - knowing that you are free to break your promise creates all kinds of conflicts. A 2009 scientific study “The Neural Circuitry of a Broken Promise” found that when subjects made commitments, knowing that they had permission to break them, their neural patterns actually predicted that they would break the promise, even before they did. In addition, the study found activation in certain parts of the brain, suggesting an emotional conflict before the promise was ever broken.

So, breaking promises is not great, but preemptively absolving your promises is even worse! How could we go into Yom Kippur with a statement like this?

Further, not coincidentally, Kol Nidrei is, historically speaking, a highly controversial piece. It has withstood centuries of opposition - both within Jewish tradition and by our external societies. Time and time again, Kol Nidrei was dangerously wielded

by oppressors who championed the piece as proof that Jews could not be trusted. Dating back to the Byzantine emperor Justinian I, and pervading European court systems years later, Jews were saddled with the "Jew's Oath" - a vilifying edict that Jews could not stand as reliable witnesses in Christian court. As recently as 60 years ago, Elizabeth Dilling's "The Jewish Religion: Its Influence Today" points to Kol Nidrei as a disparaging reflection of the supposed Jewish perspective on commitment.

Within our own tradition, debate ensued over the piece. How could we be so cavalier in shrugging off responsibilities? Would a technical declaration to absolve them even work halakhically speaking? How would it look to outsiders? The ninth century Rav Amram Gaon, who in fact recorded a version of Kol Nidrei in his own siddur, commented, "The holy academy sent word that this is a foolish custom and it is forbidden to practice it." Years later, even the esteemed R' Samson Raphael Hirsch once omitted Kol Nidrei (though he later recanted.)

What is fascinating is that the history of Kol Nidrei, the way it came to form - shifting tenses and all - is the key to unlocking its beauty. Kol Nidrei was not always written the way we see it in today's Ashkenaz machzorim. R' Amram Gaon's version was actually written in the past tense -- that all previous promises should be annulled. But just a few centuries later, the Tosafists pushed for Kol Nidrei to have a future orientation, to act as an anticipatory cancellation of vows. The custom ultimately settled with the version of one of the most prominent Tosafists, Rabbenu Tam, Rashi's grandson, which is the version commonly used by Ashkenazim today.

So back to our question. With all the historical controversy, all the psychological evidence, all the halakhic and hashkafic debate -- why Kol Nidrei? And even more, why a future-oriented Kol Nidrei that seems to tell us that our promises won't matter. That our word does not have to be our bond? Why go into Yom Kippur with such pessimism, and annul our vows even before we have a chance to try to fulfill them?

I would like to suggest that Kol Nidrei is NOT about permission to be Promise Breakers. It is about breaking us out of being Promise Makers. The Torah is actually "not a fan" (as my college students would say) of making promises. Numerous *pesukim* including some in Devarim (23:21-23). and Kohelet (5:1,4,6) discourage us from making vows we cannot keep. Clearly, the Torah takes issues with us breaking promises. It is no secret that, as flawed humans, we break all sorts of commitments to ourselves and others. Try googling "Why New Year's resolutions fail." The search results yield without exaggeration, almost 6 million results in less than ½ a second!

Needless to say, we frequently fail to live up to our resolutions. We can understand why the Torah would discourage empty promises. But here is the crazy thing. Even when we DO keep our promises, Chazal tell us it is still not ideal to have made them! In Nedarim 22a, Shmuel goes so far as to say, "Even when one fulfills his vow, he is called wicked." Someone who KEEPS a promise is considered wicked! Could it be because he never should have made it to begin with? That even when we keep our promises, in a way, we are failing ourselves?

I recently read a fascinating 2014 study called, "Worth Keeping but Not Exceeding: Asymmetric Consequences of Breaking Versus Exceeding Promises." The study first confirms what is probably obvious - someone breaking a promise is perceived negatively by his peers. However, the study goes further. It indicates that once a promise is fulfilled, the peer's evaluation flatlines. In other words, exceeding a promise - going above and beyond what you committed to - seems to have little effect on peer evaluation. The study concludes, "breaking one's promise is costly, but exceeding it does not appear worth the effort." All of this is to say is that resolutions, even when we manage to keep them, are limited. They can be helpful, but ultimately, they might hamper our willingness to strive for more. They do not actually change us.

Resolutions are a mechanism for dealing with our moral and spiritual challenges. But it cannot stop



there. Imagine a married couple. If I were to tell you that the sole reason they did not stray, that neither spouse had an affair, was because of their vow, their commitment, would not you think something was off? Wouldn't you want a couple to stay loyal to one another because their relationship is so precious, so enriching, that they are intrinsically motivated, even inspired, to protect its sanctity? Relying on vows and the adrenaline of willpower are tools, useful, but ultimately, if that is all there is, there is something missing.

Kol Nidrei is NOT about forgiving ourselves for being "total flakes" (another college term) and it is not about preemptively absolving our promises so that we can live with ourselves. Kol Nidrei is about approaching Yom Kippur with the statement that we strive for MORE than the bare minimum of a fulfilled promise.

The Yom Kippur liturgy is riddled with details that ask us to uproot our assumptions, repair our relationships - with one another, with God, with ourselves. The *tefillot* hold our hand through finding new paradigms and present us with the practicalities of change because true change IS practical. With all its controversy and its mystery, Kol Nidrei sets the stage for a Yom Kippur that is not about broken - or even fulfilled - promises, it is not about resolution, but rather deep and true revolution.

# VIDUI

Mrs. Slovie Jungreis Wolff

What does Hashem want from us? And what do we want from ourselves?

Dovid HaMelech was confronted by Nosson HaNavi after his incident with Batsheva. He was given a *moshal*, a parable, and had no idea that the story was about him. After hearing the *moshal* and casting judgement on the man, Nosson HaNavi declares “*Atah haish!*” - You are the man! This is really all about you!

The Navi describes what happens next.

נתן - *And David said to Nosson.*

But then there is a blank space. Why? We find the words of Dovid next. Just two words.

’לה חטאתי *I have sinned against G-d.*

A space and two words. Why?

The Vilna Gaon explains that the space is telling us the mindset of Dovid. The space is the silence that filled the room. Dovid is engaged in an inner struggle. This is a huge moment. He has been confronted and now he is consumed with inner turmoil. I am the *melech!* I am the king! Technically I am right! I did not really do anything wrong. What is he talking about?

Finally, Dovid made a decision. ’לה חטאתי *I have sinned against G-d*, he cried out in anguish. Dovid was heartbroken.

The Rambam teaches us in *Hilchos Teshuvah* that *vidui* is inseparable from *teshuvah*. The mitzvah of *teshuvah* in the Torah makes clear mention of *vidui*. “*Vihisvadu es chatoseichem asher taasu*” - And they, the Jewish people should confess their sins that they committed.

There is no *teshuvah* unless it is accompanied by verbal confession.

Yes, we want to do better. Yes, we want to be better. But this becomes a fleeting thought along with thousands of other thoughts. For a thought to have lasting meaning we must create words that are expressed and clarified.

The person who can pause, contemplate, stop blaming, stop rationalizing, stop minimizing the actions and hurt caused, and then say like Dovid haMelech: “’חטאתי לה” *I have sinned against You, Hashem.* Yes, I am responsible. This person has experienced a life changing moment.

This brings us to the *vidui* confession, the confessional prayer of Yom Kippur.

First some thoughts about *vidui* so that we can approach the moment properly.

\**Vidui* is recited standing in a bowed position similar to that used during Shemoneh Esrei, while saying the Modim prayer. It is important not to lean on something.

\**Vidui* is said in the order of the *Aleph Beit*, to help us rectify our actions against the 22 sacred letters of the *Aleph Beit* through which the Torah is written. The *Chayei Adam* teaches us that if one knows that he needs to add a certain action or transgression that was committed, it should be integrated into the *vidui*. For example, if you realize you have not davened with proper *kavanah* and thought then by the letter ‘*heh*’, when we recite “*he’evinu*”- we have caused perversion, we would add “*hispalalti bli kavanah re’uyah*” - I davened without proper mindfulness.

So, it would be wise to take the time before Yom Kippur arrives and contemplate. What do I want to add to my *vidui*? Make it real. Make it personal.

\**Vidui* is recited in *lashon rabim*, in the plural form. *Ashamnu. Bagadnu. Gazalnu.* We have become guilty. We have betrayed. We have robbed. If this is such a personal moment why are we talking about other people's sins?

The *Sefer Chasidim* explains that this based on the concept of *areivut*, responsibility. We are not only accountable to ourselves. We are responsible for one another. We are davening not only for ourselves, but we must make room in our lives, in our hearts, for others as well. I am not simply asking for forgiveness for myself. I cannot just focus on myself and be self-absorbed. Hashem, I care for my people. Please Hashem, heal us. Send us your *brochot*. Take us out of this *tza'ar*, grief. Forgive us. Help us through this difficult darkness.

With a broken heart, Dovid went on to compose his Tehillim. In *Perek Nun Aleph*, Dovid says "*Lev tahor bara li Elokim, veru'ach nachon chadesh bekirbi*" - Hashem create in me a pure heart and renew within me a true spirit.

Now we are ready to recite *vidui* and recreate ourselves to be the person we were meant to be.

The first ingredient in *vidui* is the emotion involved. Simply reciting a list of sins by rote will not reach the greatness of what *vidui* can accomplish for us. Obviously we are not telling Hashem anything new. Hashem has seen it all. Hashem has heard it all. We are speaking to ourselves, seeing the truth within ourselves and asking Hashem to help us heal our spiritual deficiencies so that we can live with purpose and meaning.

We begin to recite *vidui* and say "*Aval anachnu va'avoseinu chatanu,*" BUT we and our forefathers have sinned.

Why *aval*, why but?

This word, *aval*, but, has allowed us to fall into the place we are in. We often know that we are doing something that is not right. 'I really shouldn't do this/say this/ have done that/said

that/reacted like that, BUT....' And then we add our excuse.

Now we must simply say *Aval anachnu chatanu.* No excuses now.

Let us try to take a few lines from *vidui* for better understanding.

1. *Ashamnu.* We have become guilty.

Rav Hirsch teaches that *shmamah* is an empty space. *Shamem* is mental desolation, an emptiness of the mind. Add the *aleph* and now we are saying I am responsible for the spiritual desolation in my life.

We come into this world with tremendous potential. Each one of us has our own unique gifts to bring to this world. Hashem has given us the power of speech, of energy, of mind, of love, of time, and what have we done with all our blessings? Have we become givers or takers? Built or destroyed?

We are responsible. We write our own story.

2. *Bagadnu.* We have betrayed.

Rav Hirsch teaches us that *bagadnu* is from the *lashon* of *beged*, a garment. If I fail to justify the trust that is placed in me as a human being filled with character and truth then I am merely a *beged* of a person, an empty garment lacking inner essence. A *bogged* is called a traitor.

*Bagadnu* means we have betrayed loved ones who have counted on us for kind words, for loyalty, for support. We have betrayed Hashem by being ungrateful for the life we have been given. Instead of gratitude we have complained or acted entitled. We have looked at other people's blessings and forgotten about our own.

3. *Gazalnu.* We have robbed.

Who me? Rob? Steal?

We have taken money, borrowed property and ingredients, without paying back. We have enjoyed Hashem's earth and all its bounties without saying a blessing. We have robbed

people of their privacy and dignity, forwarded embarrassing texts and videos. We have robbed people of their time.

I ask that you take time before Yom Kippur and contemplate the words of *vidui*.

I would like to leave you with my prayer, my blessing from my heart.

My mother, Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis *a"h* told me that when my Zayda, HaRav Avraham HaLevi Jungreis *zt'l* came from Bergen Belsen, he asked everyone he met:

"Did you see my father? Did you see my mother? My brothers? My sisters?"

"No. We did not see them." The answer was always the same.

But then my Zayda met a man who said, "I saw them. I saw your father, the Rav, your mother, the Rebbetzin, and the grandchildren, the

babies, all in line at the gas chambers. You are the sole survivor. Everyone else was murdered."

With tears, my Zayda cried out in Yiddish, "*Ribono Shel Olahm, Ich beit nur eine zach...*I beg of You Hashem, only one thing. That all of my children and all of my descendants, and all Jewish children, should remain loyal to Torah."

I call out to Hashem, *Avinu Malkeinu*, yes, we have made our mistakes. *Ashamnu. Bagadnu*. We have caused desolation, we have been ungrateful. But in our heart of hearts we have just one *tefillah*, one wish. That we, our children, all our children remain loyal to You. Help us Hashem. Help us live as Your children, Your nation. Give us the *koach*- strength, to get through this difficult time, open our hearts and our children's hearts, bring us home to *Yerushalayim*, heal us and help us raise the next generation of *Klal Yisroel*.

Show us Your kindness and forgive us.

# Yom Kippur: Vidui

Mrs. Penina Bernstein

Each year, the *al-cheit* insertion into our Shemoneh Esrei is the time during our *tefillah* where we take a step back and articulate many of the sins that we might have committed over the past year.

The Rambam in *Perek Bet* (Chapter 2) of *Hilchot Teshuvah* provides a detailed explanation of the exact process of *teshuvah*:

What is repentance? The sinner shall cease sinning, and remove sin from his thoughts, and wholeheartedly conclude not to revert back to it, It is, moreover, essential that his confession shall be by spoken words of his lips, and all that which he concluded in his heart shall be formed in speech.

וימה היא התשובה?  
הוא שיעזב החוטא  
החטא ויסירו  
ממחשבתו ויגמר בלבו  
שלא יעשהו עוד וצריך  
להתנדות בשפתיו  
ולומר ענינות אלו  
שגמר בלבו:

In this *halacha*, the Rambam states that beyond the mental commitment to stay away from a particular sin, one must also admit by mouth that which he has stated in his heart. It is not only enough to acknowledge it internally, but one must explicitly verbalize the sin as well. In addition, the Rambam explains that a person who only admits it verbally, but does not commit in his heart to change, is likened to a person whom after becoming ritually impure from a holding a bug, attempts to immerse in a ritual bath, a *mikvah*, while still holding the bug. The only way this individual can rid himself of this ritual impurity is by letting go of the source of the impurity, the bug. The parallel here is clear - in order to fulfill the mitzvah of *teshuvah*, once must completely abandon the sin, and let go of the bug - the sin.

This comment of the Rambam provides us with guidance as to how exactly we must approach the lengthy lists of sins appearing in the *al cheit* prayer. The detailed *al cheit* presents us with the opportunity to verbally admit our sins, but that should not be enough - we must also make a mental commitment in our minds and hearts to not return to that action.

In *Orot HaTeshuvah*, Chapter 5, Rav Kook explains that true *teshuvah* has the potential to remove our blinders, *l'hasir davar hachotzeits me'al ha'ayin* - to remove that which covers the eye from the eye. With the removal of each sin through *teshuvah*, an entire field of vision is open to the individual - of what his/her potential is and how he/she can improve. When we engage in proper *teshuvah*, worlds are opened to us, worlds that we can tap into with our newfound sight. When we utilize the *al cheit* lists as a springboard for areas of improvement, and we commit ourselves to working on the sins that are enumerated in them we open ourselves up to new potential and possibilities.

Carol Dweck, a famous psychologist, coined the important term "growth mindset." People who possess a growth mindset believe that they can improve with hard work, and that their most basic and simplistic abilities can be improved through hard work. When it comes to *teshuvah*, a person must possess a growth mindset - a belief that one can grow through one's effort and work.

The *al cheit tefillah* is the time in our prayer where we begin to do the work. Hopefully we've taken time during the month of Elul to begin this process, but for many of us, standing and reciting this *tefillah* on Yom Kippur when we don't have access to much of the material things that distract us daily, is the time when we truly begin to reflect. It is a time where we take a step back and we list all the potential sins that we might

have done over the past year. The scaffolding of our *nussach hatefillah* (the prayer formula) provides us with a window to reexamine our past year through real-life examples. Instead of racking our brains to identify things we may have done wrong, our *tefillah* acknowledges that many people commit these particular sins and challenges us to think about what our personal connection to them might be. There are many tools and guides that have been produced by multiple organizations, including the OU, to help spark one's mind in formulating personal connections and regrets. This is due to the fact that some of the sins listed in the *al cheit* prayer require understanding and explanation. Not all have an obvious connection to our lives and taking some time before Yom Kippur to think and connect these *tefillot* to our actions may be helpful to your prayer experience. The Gemara in *Maseches Brachos* tells us that the Chassidim Rishonim used to prepare an hour before praying each morning to ready themselves for the *tefillah* experience. This same idea must apply to our recitation of *al cheit* - we must ready ourselves in advance so that our *tefillah* is a productive step in our *teshuvah* journey.

Rav Aharon Lichtenstein z"l explained in a *teshuvah drasha* that *viddui* contains two kinds of confessions. He states "there are those which are themselves sins, and others which are not inherently sins, but are either areas of experience or activity within which the sin takes place, or a kind of quality or mind-set which attends upon the sin." When examining many of the lines of the *al cheit tefillah*, one can fit each example into these categories:

- *Ma'achal ve'mishteh*, an action
- *Neshech u'marbit*, taking interest is an action, feelings of the heart - is a mindset upon which sins take place.

Understanding that our sins fall into these categories can deepen our understanding as to why our *teshuvah* process must be both an expression of the soul and an expression of the mouth. Our sins are manifestations of both our physical being and our mental/emotional being,

and so our *teshuvah* process must reflect both of those dimensions as well.

Rav Lichtenstein's explanation to a particular *al cheit*, that of *al cheit shechatanu lefanecha bivli da'at*, the sin we committed in front of You without knowledge, I believe can provide us with a deeper understanding into the rest of the *al cheit* prayer as well.

Rav Lichtenstein explains that *bivli da'at*, can be understood in two ways. "Some, perhaps most, would be inclined to understand it in the second sense [that of mindset]: it is that which enables us to be sinners. We were not sufficiently heedful, and as a result a particular sin ensued." In other words, this statement - asking for forgiveness for a lack of knowledge, encompasses all of our sins as it is this lack of knowledge that serves as a precursor to so many of the other sins that we commit. As we enter a new year, mindfulness and thought are tools that can help us become the best versions of ourselves.

Rav Lichtenstein offers a second approach, explaining that perhaps *bivli da'at*, is itself a sin, perhaps it fits into the first category. "A certain mindlessness is a failing in as much as we do not then fully realize the *tzelem Elokim* (image of God) within us, the *tzelem Elokim* that provides us with the knowledge that makes us human. Quite apart from that, inasmuch as the *bivli da'at*, the lack of focus and concentration, defines our relationship to God, we are not "perpetually dwelling upon God. When some quantitative or qualitative *shikhecha*, forgetfulness, intrudes, then *bivli da'at* is a sin in its own right."

He continues, "That being the case, the *teshuvah* which is specifically incumbent upon us is the *teshuvah* of return, of narrowing the distance, of no longer forgetting, of intensifying our awareness, of bridging the gap." When we examine the *al cheit tefillah* we do just that, we intensify our awareness to focus on our misgivings and our mistakes. We tune into that which we did wrong; we utilize our *da'at* to

highlight our own mistakes with the purpose of bridging the distance between us and *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* by returning towards Him through our *teshuvah*. May this Yamim Noraim season be one of *da'at*, of mindfulness, of reflection that allows you to take steps closer towards HaKadosh Baruch Hu through the process of *teshuvah*, both of soul and body.

## Selichot: The Thirteen Middot

### A Shift of Focus – Hakadosh Boruch Hu's Attributes

Mrs. Sara Malka (Poupko) Reichman

The Gemara Rosh Hashanah tells us that there is a covenant with regards to achieving forgiveness for *Am Yisrael*. When in need of forgiveness, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* (Hashem) guarantees that if *Am Yisrael* recites the - ל"ג מידות the thirteen attributes of Hashem, He will not leave them empty handed. The Jewish nation is equipped with a tool to absolve themselves – at least partially – of their sins. This is a curious statement. One would think that at that critical hour on Yom Kippur when our fate hangs in the balance and we are begging for G-d's forgiveness, it would be far more helpful to focus on repentance. Rather than listing G-d's attributes at the waning moments of Yom Kippur, it would seem more appropriate to list our own improved attributes. For example, a formula like this one may advocate well for us in the heavenly courts. I, \_\_\_\_\_ used to have a temper, but have become more patient this year or, Master of the World, who better than You knows how generous I always am with my belongings. Just yesterday \_\_\_\_\_ who never returns anything asked to borrow my favorite jacket and I graciously handed it over.

The thirteen attributes were first revealed to us through Moshe Rabbeinu as a response to his request: כבודיך Please show me Your glory. Moshe wanted to know Hashem's essence. The Creator told Moshe that Moshe will only grasp His "back", not His "face." The Nefesh Hachayim explains that Hashem was conveying to Moshe an important principle. We can never know G-d's essence. We can know the *Ribono Shel Olam* only through the way He interacts with us in this limited world. This mode of Hashem's interactions with us is referred to as the thirteen attributes - ל"ג מידות. As we are being judged, why are we speaking of Hashem's mode of interaction with the world rather than our own?

Another interesting discussion about the ל"ג מידות revolves around a disagreement between the sages about whether the שם השם (name of Hashem) that is doubled at the beginning of the thirteen attributes is to be counted among the attributes or whether the Name is an introduction to the ל"ג מידות. What is so critical about this question? What would the implication of the name of Hashem as an introduction be?

The Pachad Yitzchok (יום כיפור, מאמר א) expounds upon the idea expressed in the Gemara Rosh Hashanah that distinguishes between the first שם השם and the second time It is mentioned - *Hashem Hashem*. Hashem prior to sin and Hashem following sin. Rav Hutner points out that we can all feel a difference in our prayers in the days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur in contrast to the rest of the year. To explain this, he cites the Sages' statement in the Gemara Rosh Hashanah 17 quoted by Rashi in *Shemot* 33: that Hashem revealed Himself to Moshe in a vision wrapped in a tallis like a *sheliach tzibbur* in order to demonstrate to Moshe how to ask forgiveness when reciting the ל"ג מידות. Certainly, Moshe knew how to daven and was not in need of a class in the methods of prayer. Understanding the discussion of the distinction between the first mention of Hashem's Name and the second mention of Hashem's Name will shed light on this lesson in prayer. The Sages explain that the reason Hashem's Name appears twice is that the first Name refers to Hashem prior to sin. The second, to Hashem after one commits a sin. The specific Name of Hashem mentioned at the beginning of the thirteen attributes, the Shem Havaya, expresses G-d as The Creator *ex nihilo*. The Creator who created something from nothing, יש מאין. The world that was created had the ability to endure as long as sin was not committed. The moment that a sin is committed, undermining the purpose of the world, a new creation was necessary in order for the world to endure. Another creation *ex nihilo*. A space where humanity can exist through the power of *teshuvah*. The second Name of Hashem (שם השם).



The power of *teshuvah* as a new creation has no expression in terms that relate to any other area of life. The word “kind” is used to describe G-d. Kindness finds expression in the human experience as well. Human beings do not create something from nothing. Creation *ex nihilo* is expressed only in The Name of Hashem. The *Shem* is mentioned at the beginning of the attributes. Twice. Now there is a new world. A world that can contain the sinner through the power of *teshuvah*. Prayer within the context of *teshuvah* is a qualitatively different sort of prayer. Moshe Rabeinu is unfamiliar with this sort of prayer. And so, the *Pachad Yitzchak* explains, Hashem demonstrates the procedure of prayer for forgiveness. And our prayers during the *Aseret Yemei Teshuvah* are experienced differently because they are different. They belong to the world of *teshuvah*.

Only in a world in which *teshuvah* exists is there the need for undeserved kindness, mercy, patience, and the bearing of transgressions. Hashem Hashem twice serves as an introduction, or rather as a prerequisite, to the rest of the attributes.

When it comes to approaching Hashem on Yom Kippur, there is the well-known approach of working on correcting our deeds and character in the weeks leading up to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. We focus on our character and worthiness, in hope of attaining both a relationship with G-d and a positive decree. There is a vastly different approach emphasized in *Chassidut* but rooted far earlier. It can be traced back to the moment that Moshe Rabbeinu found himself standing in the cleft of the cliff awaiting instruction from the *Ribono Shel Olam* in achieving repentance. It occurs when Hashem instructs Moshe to recite Hashem’s attributes on behalf of Am Yisrael who is in need of forgiveness. Rather than approaching Hashem with a list of our accomplishments and improvements and hoping to procure forgiveness based on our own merits, we focus on Hashem’s attributes, and rely on His mercy, His kindness, His patience in waiting before punishing, His willingness to carry the burden of our sins and cleanse us from them.

Rather than saying I am now worthy of a good judgment and a renewed relationship with the *Ribono Shel Olam*, we stand before Hashem as if facing Hashem in the cleft of the cliff, and implore Him to pass His goodness before us and allow us a glimpse of the mercy and kindness that will draw us near and purify us in spite of our imperfections, purely as a result of His thirteen attributes. And as a result of the creation of a world in which the penitent sinner can exist. We approach with the humility that when we are in need of forgiveness and the restoration of a relationship, we may not yet be worthy of, it is His attributes that are incomparably more reliable than our own.

May we, each individual, and Klal Yisrael as a whole, merit an outpouring of mercy and kindness as we stand before Hashem this Yom Kippur.

## Yom Kippur: Torah Reading – Vayikra

Rachel Sims, Esq.

The Torah reading for Yom Kippur morning, quite appropriately, describes the service performed on this day by the Kohen Gadol (High Priest) in the Beit Hamikdash (Holy Temple) in Jerusalem. I chose this topic because many times I find myself not concentrating on the Torah reading and I thought that if there were some powerful message that we can learn from this reading, I wanted to bring it to life and share.

I want to set the stage with a powerful story about the holy and beloved Chassidic Rabbi, Reb Levi Yitzchok from Berditchev as told by Rabbi Yaakov Yosef Reinman.<sup>1</sup> In Berditchev, located in the Ukraine, there lived a drunk man known as Yankel the Gambler. Yankel was an innkeeper who neglected his inn and wasted most of his time playing cards. His observance of the Torah was practically non-existent. Yet, Rav Levi Yitzchak never despaired of bringing Yankel back to his roots; back to a Torah-observant life. He always spoke to him warmly and with encouragement.

One day, Rav Levi Yitzchok passed Yankel playing cards in the street with some of his friends. “Yankel,” said Rav Levi Yitzchok, “I envy you.” “You envy me? Why,” replied Yankel. Rav Levi Yitzchok responded, “Our Sages say that when a person does *teshuvah* and repents all his sins are transformed into merits. You have such a large accumulation of sins, Yankel, that when you finally decide to repent, you will have a vast storehouse of merit.”

Yankel smiled and said, “Rebbe, I have a secret for you; Next year you are going to envy me even more than you envy me now, because by then I

will have a much larger accumulation of potential merits.”

Rav Levi Yitzchok chuckled and continued on his way. And from that day on, for several years, Rav Levi Yitzchok and Yankel would have a similar conversation.

One day, Yankel’s wife came knocking on Rav Levi Yitzchak’s door, “Rebbe, my husband is deathly ill. The doctors think he is going to die. Please come help him.”

Rav Levi Yitzchok rushed to Yankel’s bedside at the inn and found him indeed close to death. “So, Yankel,” the Rav said, “We’ve been having this conversation for years. You always said I would envy you more and more with each passing day. Should I envy you now?”

Yankel coughed and smiled. “I’ll answer your question, Rebbe. When I rented this inn from the local squire, it was a fine building in excellent shape. But I neglected it. I was too busy drinking and playing cards.” And so, the building fell into ruin. The paint peeled; the roof leaked. The walls cracked. One day, the squire came to visit during a torrential downpour. “What have you done, Yankel,” he exclaimed, “I trusted you with a fine inn and look what a ruin you have made of it! That is my answer to you, Rebbe.” Yankel burst into tears and his soul departed his body. Rav Levi Yitzchok said, “Yankel has repented and returned his soul to its Maker in purity. He has repaired the inn that was entrusted to him.”

*Teshuvah*, repentance is simple. It is true regret, sincere regret, telling Hashem I am truly sorry for what I have done. And that is the theme of this

<sup>1</sup> ArtScroll Series, *Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev*, by Rabbi Yaakov Yosef Reinman, Copyright 2011 by Mesorah Publications, Ltd.

Yom Kippur reading – repentance and forgiveness.

The Torah portion that is read during the morning services of Yom Kippur is found in *Parshat Acharei Mot* – which means after they died. Who died? Two sons of Aharon Hakohen– Naadav and Avihu.

The Torah introduces the Yom Kippur service by telling us that G-d spoke to Moshe after the death of Aharon's two sons, which implies that there was a connection between this sad event and the Yom Kippur service. What is the connection? The Yerushalmi Yoma gives us an explanation - just as Yom Kippur brings atonement, so the death of a Tzaddik, a righteous person, brings atonement. The *Meshech Chochma* explains that Yom Kippur is an *eit ratzon* – a time of favor and is thus an opportune time for atonement.

The Torah reading continues with Hashem explaining to Moshe the special services to be performed by the High Priest in the Beit Hamikdash, the Holy Temple, on Yom Kippur. Hashem said to Moshe, "Speak to Aharon your brother and let him know that he may not come at all times into the Sanctuary within the curtain in front of the cover that is upon the Ark – meaning the Holy of Holies – so that he should not die, for in a cloud will I appear upon the cover." Having stated the prohibition against entering the Holy of Holies, the Torah now tells us the procedure the High Priest must follow when he is permitted to enter. Says the Torah, "Only with this may Aharon come into the Holy of Holies with a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for an elevation offering."

The Torah then tells us what type of garments the High Priest must wear when entering the Holy of Holies, the place that only the High Priest entered once a year – which was on Yom Kippur. The High Priest was usually distinguished from an ordinary priest by the eight garments he wore, four of which were golden. On Yom Kippur, however, the High Priest removed the four golden garments each time before he

entered the Holy of Holies. While in the Holy of Holies, the High Priest was only allowed to wear white linen garments – he was not permitted to wear the garments which had gold in them. Why not? From here we learn a very famous concept brought by Rashi -- *ein kateigor na'aseh saneigor*, a prosecutor does not become a defense counselor. The gold in the garments suggests the sin of the Golden Calf – the grave sin committed by the Jewish people forty days after they had received the Torah on Mount Sinai. For this same reason, many women do not wear gold jewelry on Yom Kippur. The gold acts as a prosecutor and speaks against the Jewish people. Thus, the High Priest should not be wearing anything with gold when he performs the special Yom Kippur service within the Holy of Holies, for this service is meant to defend the Jewish people and gain them forgiveness.

We find what appears to be a glaring contradiction. The Torah tells Aharon that he should come into the sanctuary with a *par ben bakar*, a young bull, for a sin offering. A young bull is a calf! How is it that the Torah states that the High Priest cannot wear garments with gold in it because gold suggests the sin of the Golden Calf – what about bringing a calf? That certainly appears to be a stark reminder of this sin - does not the young bull also suggest the Sin of the Golden Calf? How are we to understand this? What is the difference between gold which the Kohen Gadol could not wear on Yom Kippur in the Holy of Holies and a calf? They were both used in the Sin of the Golden Calf.

My son offered a beautiful explanation which he saw in the *piyyutim*, the poetry that is read during the *chazzan's* repetition on the second day of Pesach. In describing how Hashem publicly displayed His love for the Jewish people, the poet said, "You, Hashem publicly displayed our love for them; by causing the idolatrous bull to be replaced with the sacrificial bull and by exalting the bull offering above all other offerings, You removed the stain of their sins...." --- and the poem continues in this vein.

What can we learn from this? Gold is a metal, it is inanimate, it is lifeless – once it was used for something negative or bad, here for idolatry, it cannot be changed. It cannot now be used to defend the Jewish people from prosecution.

However, a cow or a bull is a living thing, it can change. Just because it was used for something negative or bad, doesn't mean it cannot be changed and be used for something good. In fact, Hashem had Aharon bring a cow as a sin offering to show that Hashem forgave Aharon and the Jewish people for the grave sin of the Golden Calf.

As set forth so beautifully in the *piyyut* I just shared, Hashem exalted the bull offering above all offerings – it is the choicest highest level sacrifice. Why? Because the gravest sin committed by the Jewish people was the sin of the Golden Calf (which is a cow). Hashem wanted to show his Jewish children that he forgave them. Precisely the same animal – the cow – which is a living thing, which was used for bad is now being used for good. The cow is a living thing; it is not inanimate and therefore is capable of change.

Human beings are living things, so even more so a human being can change. Of course, a human being is more elevated than an animal; a human being can think and speak and is connected to Hashem. This is precisely what *teshuvah* (repentance) is about. Just because I used my body to do something I should not have done, I sinned, I spoke *lashon hara*, I did something Hashem did not want me to do, does not mean I cannot repent, that I cannot change and do something good. This is the essence of Yom Kippur - Yom Kippur is about repenting, atonement, changing my ways to do better, to follow the Torah and Mitzvot; and Hashem is ready to forgive.

*Teshuvah* can be done in a second, in a moment. A person can change his or her trajectory, his or her direction in an instant. Hashem wants to see that you really mean it – you really want to change and then Hashem helps you on your

journey. Hashem forgives. It's the message of Yankel the innkeeper, it's the message of Yom Kippur day.

Wishing you all a K'tiva v'chatima tova!

# Haftarah of Yom Kippur

Mrs. Shira Schiowitz

Hashem asks a startling question in the haftarah of Yom Kippur (Yeshayahu 58:5):

Is this the fast that I desire? A day for men to starve their bodies? Is it bowing the head like a bulrush And lying in sackcloth and ashes? Do you call that a fast, A day when the Lord is favorable?

ה: הַכְּזָה, יְהִיָּה צוֹם  
אֲבַחְרֶהוּ--יּוֹם עֲנוּת  
אָדָם, נִפְשׁוֹ; הִלְכָךְ  
כְּאֶגְמוֹן רֹאשׁוֹ, וְשָׁק וְאַפְרָר  
יַצִּיעַ--הִלְזָה תִקְרָא-צוֹם,  
'יּוֹם רְצוֹן לַה'

The response to this question seems to be a resounding “yes!” This is exactly what the Torah commands for this day (Vayikra 23:32): *וְעִנִּיתֶם, אֶת נַפְשֵׁיכֶם, and you shall afflict yourselves.* Nevertheless, the haftarah rhetorically dismisses the sacrifice and dedication of the Jewish People on this day, dismissing our fasting, the lowering of our heads, the pounding of our chests during the confessions and even the uncomfortable canvas sneakers on our feet.

Our particular practices on Yom Kippur are also universally utilized by people seeking connection to God in overcoming crisis. During the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln called for a “National Day of Humiliation, Fasting and Prayer”, and proclaimed:

I do, by this my proclamation, designate and set apart Thursday, the 30TH DAY OF APRIL, 1863, as a Day of National Humiliation, Fasting and Prayer.

And I do hereby request all the people to abstain on that day from their ordinary secular pursuits, and to unite, at their several places of public worship and their respective homes, in keeping the day holy to the Lord and devoted to the humble discharge of the religious duties proper to that solemn occasion.

All this being done, in sincerity and truth, let us then rest humbly in the hope authorized by the Divine teachings, that the united cry of the nation will be heard on high and answered with blessing no less than the pardon of our national sins and the restoration of our now divided and suffering country to its former happy condition of unity and peace.

Yeshayahu challenges our practice of Yom Kippur as well as this universal method of spiritual connection. What is his opposition and what would he suggest instead? He continues to explain himself (58:6-7,9):

No, this is the fast I desire: To unlock fetters of wickedness, And untie the cords of the yoke To let the oppressed go free; To break off every yoke.

ו הַלּוֹא זֶה, צוֹם  
אֲבַחְרֶהוּ--פֶּתַח חֲרָצְבוֹת  
רָשָׁע, הַתֵּר אֲגִדּוֹת  
מוֹטָה; וְשִׁלַּח רְצוּצִים  
הַפְּשִׁים, וְכָל-מוֹטָה  
תִּנְתְּקוּ.

It is to share your bread with the hungry, And to take the wretched poor into your home; When you see the naked, to clothe him, And not to ignore your own kin.

ז הַלּוֹא פֶּרֶס לְרֹעֵב  
לַחֲמֶה, וְעֵנִיִּים מְרוּדִים  
תְּבִיא בֵּית: כִּי-תִרְאֶה  
עָרֹם וְכִסִּיתוֹ, וּמִבְּשָׂרְךָ  
לֹא תִתְעַלֵּם.

Then, when you call,  
the Lord will answer;  
When you cry, He will  
say: Here I am. If you  
banish the yoke from  
your midst, The  
menacing hand, and  
evil speech.

ט אַז תִּקְרָא וַיְהוָה  
יַעֲנֶה, תִּשְׁוֶע וַיֹּאמֶר  
הֲנִי:

*fasted, did You not see? When we starved our  
bodies, did You pay no heed?*

This outlook of Yeshayahu mirrors his message from Chapter 1 (the *haftarah* of Shabbat Chazon) where he questions the insincere sacrifices and *tefillot* that are offered in place of a society committed to the pillars of *tzedek u'mishpat*, justice and kindness. Nevertheless, it is difficult to conceive of his design for Yom Kippur, since his calls contradict the essential laws of Yom Kippur. Food is forbidden, how can we offer food to the hungry on this day? Our concern with clothing seems misplaced on a day that certain types of clothing are restricted. Lastly, the mandate to lift the burden off of others so that they can hold their heads up high seems strange on a day that we spend with our heads lowered in prayer and humility. **So, what in fact is Yeshayahu suggesting? Should we get rid of Yom Kippur and instead volunteer in a soup kitchen, organize a clothing drive or volunteer?**

Yeshayahu responds that it is indeed true that the people did the correct actions by depriving themselves of food and clothing in order to mirror the angels and to connect to Hashem. However, this self-deprivation was intended to develop empathy towards others. Fasting should sensitize the penitent to the pain of those who are hungry every day of their lives. Yom Kippur is an internal day that develops our personal religious connections to Hashem. At the same time, this internal growth is fundamentally designed to bring our attention to the external, focusing us on the needs of others. We need that day of self-limitation as a catalyst to turn outward and recognize the needs- both physically and emotionally- of all the people who surround us.

May we all experience an introspective and outwardly focused Yom Kippur. May our better understanding of our own neediness help us to relate with kindness and empathy to the needs of others.

Rav David Sabato suggests that Yeshayahu did not mean to abolish Yom Kippur, but to expand the impact of the rituals of Yom Kippur. Yeshayahu describes a community that is careful about observing Yom Kippur and thinks that their worship is sincere. It is for that reason that earlier in the prophecy, Hashem describes them as a people who are (58:2): *וְאֹתֵי, יוֹם יוֹם יִדְרְשׁוּן, to be sure, they seek Me daily, Eager to learn My ways.* For this reason, they turn to Hashem and sincerely ask (58:3): *לָמָּה לָמָּה צָמְנוּ וְלֹא רָאִיתָ, עֲבִינוּ וְנִפְשָׁנוּ וְלֹא תִדְעַ,*

# Sefer Yonah

Mrs. Lynn Kraft

Why was *Sefer Yonah* chosen as the *haftara* for *mincha* on Yom Kippur specifically? What is the connection between this ספר נבואה, book of prophecy, and the most solemn day of the year?

In order to answer this question, we need to understand the main message of *Sefer Yonah*, which is best gleaned from an analysis of the events recorded therein.

The protagonist of the book, Yonah ben Amitai, was a נביא, a prophet of ה'. We know from Yonah's being discussed in *Sefer Melachim Bet* (14: 25) that he lived in גת החפר in Northern Israel in *Nachalat Zevulun*, the portion of Zevulun, and that he was therefore a citizen of *Malchut Yisrael*, the Northern Israelite kingdom. He lived during the time period of Yeravam ben Yoash, the last politically stable king of *Malchut Yisrael* before Assyria took over and became the driving force behind the exile of the Ten Northern Tribes of *Malchut Yisrael*. During Yeravam ben Yoash's reign the people experienced tremendous material prosperity and political stability but engaged in spiritual depravity. Yeravam ben Yoash expanded the country's borders, as had been prophesied in advance by Yonah himself, not because he or the people deserved it, but because ה' was not yet ready to destroy *Bnei Yisrael*. This is important to note, in order to truly understand Yonah's character, as his first recorded *nevuah* in Tanach was one in which G-d's *middat harachamim*, attribute of mercy, seems to have overridden His *middat hadin*, attribute of justice (G-d saved Bnei Yisrael even though they did not deserve it)!

*Sefer Yonah* begins with G-d calling upon Yonah to deliver his second *nevuah* recorded in *Tanach* to the city of Ninveh, the capital of Assyria, as a result of their evil ways. Based on what ends up unfolding in the third *perek*, it seems that G-d's goal was for Yonah to inspire the people of

Ninveh to do *teshuvah* from their evil ways in order to save themselves from impending destruction.

This *nevuah* begins with ה' telling Yonah קום לך אל נינוה, *get up and go to Ninveh*. Immediately following this *nevuah*, we are told indeed that Yonah got up - ויקם יונה - but instead of going to Ninveh as expected, he instead went in the opposite direction toward Tarshish, ברוח תרשישה מפני ה', to escape from G-d.

Why on earth would Yonah want to escape from G-d? Why did he attempt to avoid delivering the *nevuah* that G-d commanded him to bring the people of Ninveh?

There are several different approaches:

Rashi suggests that Yonah attempted to escape from this *nevuah* because if Ninveh did *teshuvah* immediately upon Yonah's rebuking them, they would make Bnei Yisrael look bad in comparison since Bnei Yisrael rarely respond to the rebuke of the *Nevi'im*. *Chazal* (in the *Mechiltah*) find fault with Yonah's reasoning: יונה תבע כבוד הבן ולא יונה תבע כבוד האב, he demanded Bnei Yisrael's honor (in not wanting to make them look bad in comparison to the people of Ninveh) but not G-d's honor (by not obeying His command)—in other words, Yonah put Bnei Yisrael's honor before G-d's honor. The Abarbanel also finds fault with Yonah's reasoning here, as suggested by Rashi: perhaps the *teshuvah* of the people of Ninveh would have inspired Bnei Yisrael to do their own *teshuvah*!

The Abarbanel claims that the reason why Yonah attempted to avoid bringing G-d's *nevuah* to the people of Ninveh was because he understood that in commanding him to deliver this *nevuah*, G-d was essentially asking him to save Assyria from destruction so that they could ultimately

conquer *Malchut Yisrael* and bring about the exile of the Ten Northern Tribes. However, Yonah did not want to be the means through which to save Assyria and thereby to destroy his own people.

Yet another reason for Yonah's attempted avoidance of delivering this *nevuah* was expressed by Yonah himself later in the *sefer*, על כן קדמתי לברח תרשישה כי ידעתי כי אתה קל חנון ורחום , *therefore I attempted to escape to Tarshish—because I knew that You are a merciful and gracious G-d who is slow to anger and full of kindness and changes His mind from evil.*

Why would G-d's being a merciful G-d cause Yonah to escape from His *nevuah*—what is the connection between the two? And, perhaps more importantly, why does Yonah view G-d's *rachamim* as problematic?

The *Da'at Mikra* suggests that in speaking of G-d's *rachamim* here, Yonah is really referring to G-d's receptiveness toward *teshuvah*. Yonah is questioning the inherent justifiability of the *teshuvah* process in the first place: Ninveh has perpetrated *chamas*, which is usually translated as stealing, but is really a general term for all *aveirot ben adam l'chaveiro* in which people persecute those who cannot defend themselves. These actions have consequences that can never be reversed (the murdered cannot be brought back to life, the suffering of the afflicted cannot be undone), and yet all the people of Ninveh have to do is put on some sackcloth, express regret, and they can escape punishment for all the evil they have perpetrated? That is not just! That is not what they deserve! What about all the people they have hurt?

If we think about this in terms of a national judicial system, this sentiment becomes clearer. Imagine someone is found guilty of murder, but he expresses regret for his crime. Would a court judge ever acquit this murderer on the basis of his remorse and set him free? Does the murderer's remorse nullify the fact that he has

killed someone? Of course not. Rather, the judge would still send him to jail as a punishment for his crime.

As a more extreme example, imagine Hitler never committed suicide, and several years after WWII was over, he expressed complete remorse for all the crimes against humanity that he had perpetrated. Should the world, and ultimately G-d, just accept his *teshuvah*, wipe his slate completely clean, and therefore not punish him for what he did? Does that seem fair? How could that ever be explained to all his victims and their families?

Professor Uriel Simon takes this idea one step further. He explains that Yonah conceived of G-d's *rachamim* and His acceptance of *teshuvah* as not only unjustified, but as downright harmful to society, as it undermines the force of judgement by removing the certainty of punishment, and thereby man's clarity of judgment, since it adds a factor that cannot be calculated in advance. In other words, in a world of *din* - judgement, reward immediately follows good deeds and punishment immediately follows sin—the relationship between one's action and its consequence is linear, clear, and immediate. However, once *rachamim* and *teshuvah* enter the picture, suddenly not all sins are punished (and, vice versa, not all good deeds are rewarded)—the relationship between one's action and its consequence is suddenly muddled and confusing, delayed and circuitous, and G-d's actions are no longer clear at all.

Perhaps Yonah already learned this lesson after his first *nevuah* given during the time of Yeravam ben Yoash, when G-d did not destroy Bnei Yisrael even though they deserved to be destroyed as a result of their sinful behavior, because G-d decided to use *rachamim* instead and delay their punishment. Yonah saw that rather than teach Bnei Yisrael the valuable lesson that they had better change their ways lest they be destroyed, this act of G-d's mercifulness instead led Bnei Yisrael to believe that changing their ways was



unnecessary because they could always depend on G-d's mercifulness to save them instead.

Rabbi Yissachar Yaakovson, in his book, *Chazon HaMikra*, explains that whereas *Iyov* questioned the existence in this world of *צדיק ורע לו*, *why bad things happen to good people*, *Yonah* questioned the existence of *לו רשע וטוב לו*, *why good things happen to bad people*. In other words, *Iyov* challenged G-d's *מדת הדין*, *attribute of justice*, and *Yonah* challenged G-d's *מדת הרחמים*, *attribute of mercy*.

The following famous events of *Sefer Yonah* - the ship being caught in a storm, his volunteering to go overboard to save the others on board, his being swallowed and then spit out by a fish—precipitate an outward turnaround in *Yonah*, in that he finally delivers G-d's *nevuah* to *Ninveh* as he was originally commanded. Unfortunately, however, these events do not seem to precipitate any change in *Yonah's* internal philosophies about the ideas of *teshuvah* and *rachamim*.

In fact, his immediate reaction in the first *pasuk* of *Perek Daled*, upon seeing the people of *Ninveh* saving themselves from destruction by doing *teshuvah* is: *וירע אל יונה רעה גדולה ויחר לו*, *this was a great evil to Yonah and he was angry*. He then davened to 'ה complaining that He was a merciful G-d, quoting the famous *י"ג מדות הרחמים*, *Thirteen Attributes of Mercy*, in describing Him. Yet he stops short in his quotation—notably, substituting the *middah* of *emet*, truth, with a new description of his own: *ונחם על הרעה*, *[He] who changes His mind from evil*.

Why does *Yonah* substitute the *middah* of *emet* with this new *middah*? Because that was his fundamental problem with 'ה that 'ה was not exercising *emet*, truth, which is inherently a *middah* of *din*, an attribute of judgment, but was rather *נחם על הרעה*, *changing His mind from evil*, i.e. exercising *rachamim*.

*Yonah ben Amitai*, whose father's name shares the same root as *emet*, truth, could not fathom

G-d's lack of *emet*, as his very essence represents *emet*.

In stark contrast to *Avraham Avinu*, the embodiment of *chesed*, lovingkindness, who fought unsuccessfully for the salvation of *Sodom* and *Amorah* when faced with its impending destruction, *Yonah* the embodiment of *emet*, truth, fought unsuccessfully for the city of *Ninveh's* destruction when faced with its successful *teshuvah*.

One of the less famous stories of *Sefer Yonah*, which we are not taught in preschool, is its concluding story of the *kikayon*. This story has generated a lot of discussion throughout the ages, and therefore many different interpretations, because it is quite complicated.

We are told in *Perek Daled* that in light of *Yonah's* failure to convince 'ה to destroy the people of *Ninveh* as he feels they deserve, he asks 'ה to take his life. When 'ה refuses, *Yonah* leaves the city of *Ninveh*, builds himself a *sukkah* to protect himself from the sun, and sits in its shade in order to see what would happen to the city. We are then told that 'ה miraculously grows a *kikayon*, a tree whose seeds produce oil and whose leaves offer a lot of shade, above *Yonah's* head in order to provide him with shade and to save him from his distress regarding *yeshuat Ninveh*, *Ninveh's* redemption. We are told that this *kikayon* made *Yonah* very happy: *וישמח יונה*, *in direct contrast to his former feeling of רעה גדולה*. However, 'ה summoned a worm the next morning at dawn to kill the *kikayon* and cause it to dry it up. He also summoned an eastern dry wind that caused the sun to burn upon *Yonah's* head, causing him to faint and ask 'ה a second time to take his life. 'ה then scolds *Yonah* for being angry that He took away his *kikayon*, accusing him of having had mercy on a tree that he did not work for or put any effort into, and which only existed for one day, but yet he was angry with 'ה for having mercy on a large city with many people and animals within it, who did not know the right path.

There are many, many questions we can ask about this story, but we will suffice with the four main ones:

1. Why would 'ה provide Yonah with a *kikayon* for shade if he had just built himself a *sukkah* for that very purpose?
2. If Yonah did not really need the shade, why did the *kikayon* make him so exorbitantly happy?
3. Why did 'ה provide something for *kikayon* only to suddenly take it away from him?
4. What is the meaning of 'ה's cryptic message to Yonah at the end?

Rav David Fohrman suggests that the *kikayon* was meant to represent the experience of רחמי 'ה, *G-d's mercifulness*, in several ways. Firstly, *rachamim* represents the giving of “unnecessary gifts,” and the *kikayon* provided Yonah with unnecessary shade. Even more so, 'ה granted Yonah this gift of extra shade even though he was undeserving of it, having been a recalcitrant messenger who escaped and explicitly disapproved of 'ה's mission. In addition, like all *rachamim*, the *kikayon* just appeared from out of nowhere. It did not grow naturally from a seed, but was miraculously placed there by 'ה making its very existence “unjustified” because there was no logical explanation for it. In these ways, the *kikayon* represented a gift whose very existence was simultaneously unnecessary, undeserved, and unjustified: the epitome of רחמי 'ה.

Perhaps that is why the *kikayon* caused such great *simcha* in Yonah—because he had received an unexpected gift from 'ה. Despite his philosophical demands to the contrary, when he became the recipient of 'ה's *rachamim* himself, he instinctively felt its warmth and comfort.

G-d then took this unexpected gift away from Yonah so suddenly to let Yonah experience himself what the world would be like the way he claimed it should be run: על פי דין, *with judgement* only, without *rachamim*. For if the world would have no *rachamim*, then he would

have no *kikayon*, which had no real reason to exist, as Yonah he had no real reason for its shade.

This experience caused Yonah to be so angry that he wanted to die—for the second time in the *perek*. However, this time his death wish was not a reaction to a lack of *din* on the part of 'ה (as was the case when Ninveh was saved), but rather to a lack of *rachamim*. This represents a true internal change on the part of *Yonah*.

For the first time in the *sefer*, he had personally experienced (both physically in terms of the shade and emotionally in terms of his *simcha*) the full benefits of 'ה רחמי 'ה through the *kikayon*, as opposed to merely philosophically contemplating them. Furthermore, he was subsequently subjected to the physical and emotional pain (i.e. fainting and death wish) of its loss. Perhaps this personal experience of the pain caused by a lack of *rachamim* led him to rethink his original philosophical position on *rachamim*, enabling him to begin to appreciate its logic and internalize it. In fact, 'ה describes Yonah as having felt compassion himself: אתה חסת על הקיקיון, *you had mercy on the kikayon*.

Rav Fohrman explains that Yonah began to think: it may be true that the *kikayon's* existence may not be justified, but neither is its destruction justified, since it will provide so much good (its leaves provide much-needed shade and sick people used to take advantage of it). In other words, he was no longer focusing on the past in search of a justification, but on the future. The argument of *din* is that we must constantly look at one's past and ask, do past actions justify the current situation? *Din* acts based on *emet*, ensuring that the current reality truly corresponds to the past reality. However, *rachamim* has a completely different logic. *Rachamim* comes from the term *rechem*, womb, as it nurtures and promotes life. The womb is not indiscriminate, and it is also critical in terms of determining which life it supports. But *rachamim's* question is different than that of *din*, for if the womb asked every egg that entered into it what past actions it had done that justified

its existence and made it deserve to live, there would be no pregnancies. Rather, instead of focusing on the past, the womb focuses on the future - what potential does this egg have? Is it viable? The womb will reject an egg if it deems it incompatible with future life. But if it is viable, the womb will nurture its growth and support its survival. This is the focus of *rachamim*—not on one's past but on one's potential in the future. That is why *rachamim* responds positively to *teshuvah*—because the power of *teshuvah* stems not from its ability to change the past (which it cannot, as *din* would correctly argue), but from its ability to change the future.

Now that יונה has finally demonstrated his capacity for compassion in the context of the *kikayon*, ה' is now ready to articulate His lesson to Yonah in full force:

ה' says to Yonah: You have finally reached a philosophical awareness of the need for *rachamim* when it came to the *kikayon*, seeing its potential to help others, even though you did not invest any effort in it, and you only experienced its good for the duration of one day. Now do you understand why I saw a need to have *rachamim* upon an entire city of people that I myself created and that has existed since the beginning of time (implied by its great population size—both human and animal), whose myriad of people sin due to mere lack of knowledge, and therefore have tremendous potential to improve their ways once correctly educated?

In other words, yes, it is true that they sinned, and according to *din*, they should be destroyed. But Yonah's own argument about the *kikayon* applies here as well, for while it is true that their continued existence may not be justified due to their past חמס, their destruction is even more unjustified because of their great potential to do good in the future. And their great potential lies in the fact that their past sins were perpetrated due to lack of knowledge—because all they have to do is learn, and then their sins will stop in the future.

Perhaps this instance is one of the most important messages of *Sefer Yonah*, demonstrating the true essence of *teshuvah* - not only about its importance, of which we already know, but about how and why it really works. Most people believe that *teshuvah* is about changing the past; that by doing *teshuvah* we can essentially erase our past deeds and start with a clean slate. What *Sefer Yonah* teaches, through ה' s educational messages to Yonah, is that *teshuvah* does not work by changing the past but by changing the future. By doing *teshuvah* we are essentially changing ourselves. By abandoning our past ways (not by erasing them, because that is impossible, but by leaving them), we are becoming different people with much greater potential to do good than we had before. That is why part and parcel of *teshuvah* is to say *viduy* —we don't ignore our sins, but rather, we approach them head on and actively change our relationship with them from one of intimacy to one of distance, and ultimately of complete disregard.

This message is so important to internalize on Yom Kippur because the day is essentially the culmination of an entire *teshuvah* process that began in Elul. During Mincha, as we are about to approach Yom Kippur's end, it is important not to lose sight of the message that *teshuvah* is about the future more than it is about the past, so that we can look toward our future and keep up what we have worked so hard to accomplish in the past month and a half. The nature of inspiration is to die down, so we read *Sefer Yonah* on Yom Kippur to remind ourselves that the entire point of the day is for the future, and we have to therefore work that much harder at it as we move forward.

# Yom Kippur Ne'ilah Part 1

## Mrs. Rachel Kosowsky

We are about to acknowledge how worthless we are. After the abbreviated *vidui*, confession, in our *amidah*, silent prayer for Ne'ilah, we will recite:

What are we? What are our lives? What is our kindness? What is our righteousness? What is our salvation? What is our power? What is our strength?

מה אנו, מה חיינו, מה  
חסדנו, מה צדקותינו,  
מה ישועתנו, מה  
לחנו, מה גבורתנו

When we compare ourselves to the Almighty, it is impossible to claim any self-worth:

What can we say before You, Hashem our G-d and the G-d of our fathers? Is it not the case that all strong ones are like nothing before you, people of repute as if they never were, the wise as if they have no knowledge, the discerning as if lacking in intelligence, because most of their deeds are empty, and the days of their lives are worthless before you, and there is no advantage to humanity over animals because all is worthless.

מה נאמר לפניך ה'  
אלקינו ואלקי  
אבותינו, הלא כל  
הגבורים כאין לפניך,  
ואנשי השם כלא היו,  
וחכמים כבלי מדע,  
ונבונים כבלי השכל,  
כי רב מעשיהם תהו,  
וימי חייהם הבל  
לפניך, ומותר האדם  
מן הבהמה אין, כי  
הכל הבל

Needless to say, this bitter sentiment is not very motivating. If all is worthless, what have we been doing for the past 24 hours? What was the point of the last ten days? Of the month of Elul before that?

Fortunately, our *tefillah* continues with a follow-up paragraph beginning with the words:

You distinguished the human being from the beginning, and You recognized him to stand before You.

אתה הבדלת אנוש  
מראש, ותכירהו  
לעמוד לפניך

When compared with Hashem, it is clear that we have no independent value, yet He chose to invest us with value. What does this mean? How are we to understand this value? And if in fact, Hashem has made us so valuable, why state that we are worthless?

In his book, *ימי זכרון*, Rav Soloveitchik explains that the value of a human being stems from the concept of שליחות. שליחות is a halakhic concept by which someone can designate another as a proxy, as a messenger and we deem this proxy as a stand-in for the one who sent him: "שלוחו של אדם כמותו."

Rav Soloveitchik suggests that every human being is a messenger of G-d, our self-worth derives from the Divine choice to give us a mission to fulfill in the world. Because we have a G-d-given mission in the world we are "כמותו", we are G-d-like, בצלם אלקים.

According to the Rav, the time, place and circumstances of the birth of each individual are not coincidental. Divine Providence determines the exact conditions which will give each individual her or his ability to carry out this Divine mission.

In this way, we are all like Moshe Rabbeinu, sent by Hashem to accomplish something of significance in this world. With the important difference that Hashem does not tell us directly

what it is that we are meant to do. Part of the job is figuring that out.

The Rav cites Rav Kook's interpretation of the *tefillah* we say immediately following the *vidui*, the confession we repeat throughout Yom Kippur. We begin with:

Before I was formed, I | אלקי עד שלא נוצרתי  
was unworthy. | איני כדאי

According to Rav Kook this refers to all the previous time periods during which I was not alive. I was not meant to be alive at those times because I would not have been able to fulfill my שליחות, my mission from Hashem. Until, finally, the generation meant for me arrived, giving me the potential to be G-d's messenger. But alas, "ועכשו שנוצרתני", *now that I have been created and given this opportunity*, "כְּאֵלוֹ לֹא נֹוצַרְתִּי", *it's as if I was not created*, because I have not fulfilled this potential, I have not achieved what G-d intended for me.

Our self-worth stems from our potential to fulfill G-d's will and we are held accountable for this expectation on Yom Kippur. The past forty days were set aside for soul-searching. What is our mission? What does Hashem expect from us? What is our spiritual potential and what are we doing to reach it? The tricky thing about potential is that involves trial and error. A runner never knows his top speed without trying to run faster. It is only through pushing ourselves that we are able to discover what our potential truly is.

When we say Ne'ilah at the end of this process of self-reflection, we appeal to Divine mercy to give us another chance, with resolve to improve, to work harder, to do better in the year to come. The *Mishnah Berurah* comments in the section of the *Shulchan Aruch* regarding Ne'ilah (או"ח (תרכג:ב, ס"ק ג):

And one should pray with much alacrity because the culmination of all of the ten days of repentance is Yom Kippur, and the culmination of Yom Kippur is the Ne'ilah service, because all is determined by the sealing and if not now, when?!

And therefore, even if one is weak from fasting, one should nonetheless gird his loins like a warrior to pray with clear, pure thoughts and to truly accept on oneself the vows of repentance, and one who is looking to be purified will be supported and be sealed in the book of good life.

ויזדרז מאד בתפלה זו  
כי תכלית כל העשרת  
ימי תשובה הוא יום  
הכפור ותכלית יום  
הכפור הוא תפילת  
נעילה שהכל הולך  
אחת החיתום, ואם לא  
עכשו אימתי

ולכן אף אם חלש הוא  
מחמת התענית מכל  
מקום יאזור כגבור  
חלציו להתפלל  
במחשבה זכה וברורה  
ולקבל על עצמו נדרי  
התשובה באמת, והבא  
לטהר מסייעין אותו  
ויחתם בספר חיים  
טובים"

As we enter Yom Kippur for this final push, let us appreciate the opportunity Hashem has given us to obtain forgiveness, to start out with a clean slate, so that we can re-connect with our ultimate purpose and continue striving to reach the great potential expected of us.

*G'mar Chatimah Tova!*

# Yom Kippur Ne'ilah: The Final Moments

Dr. Chana Ringel

Seats in the shul are filled, faces hidden behind prayer books, tears streaming down cheeks - a palpable urgency and energy is in the air. The last moments of Yom Kippur are met with our deepest emotions and aspirations, as it seems we can let nothing stand in the way of our *tefillot* and the open heavens.

The Magid of Lublin compares these moments to a hunter who has lost his way in the forest. Upon hearing a noise in the distance, fearing it may be a lion or other wild animal, he quickly shoots an arrow toward the sound, only to find a dry bush. Soon after he sees movement and shoots again, only to find his target to be some leaves rustling in the wind. Moments later, he is left with one arrow and indeed he recognizes the movement, shape and roar of a lion. The focus, intention and attention with which he sets up this last shot, knowing it is his last arrow and it is indeed one which holds in it a story of life or death. So too, we stand at the end of this forty-day period that began with the advent of the month of Elul. We have shot many arrows, with prayers, supplications, charity and being extra careful in our observances - this however is our last arrow of the night, and we do indeed put all our focus and attention into making the shot. This popular approach to Ne'ilah, the final moments before the special opportunities available on Yom Kippur end and the heavenly gates close, is one that resonates with us all.

If you would open your minds and your hearts to exploring with me another perspective to these last few moments of this holy day. After the silent *amidah* (Shemoneh Esrei) and its repetition by the *chazzan* - we have a sort of conclusive ceremony. First, we recite in unison the verse of the Shema. Then we say aloud, three times, the phrase that we are only able to whisper all year long, that of *ברוך שם כבוד ועד מלכותו לעולם ועד*, *Blessed is the Name of the Glory of His Kingdom forever and ever*, and finally we declare *ה' הוא האלוקים*, *Hashem, is the true G-d - seven times*. The Kaddish is then recited and we blow the shofar and proclaim *לשנה הבאה בירושלים*, *Next year in Jerusalem*.

## Why this closing ceremony?

### **Ne'ilah - a Prayer of Transition**

We have learned that on Yom Kippur we are elevated to the level of *malachim*, of angels, in some respect. We abstain from eating and drinking, and immerse ourselves in prayer and connecting with G-d. The Talmud tells us that we appear "before Hashem" and emerge from the day with atonement and in a purified and cleansed state. Ne'ilah is not only the closing of the Yom Kippur day, it is also the transition back into "humanity" from the elevated "angelic state."

Rav Volbe explains that when a spaceship re-enters the atmosphere it must be done at a very specific angle, or it will implode and self-destruct, losing its crew and all of the information gleaned from outer space. He explains that at the closing of Yom Kippur, we too must re-enter the mundane world at a precise angle and in a specific way to ensure that we can maintain and implement the *kedusha* (inspiration and sanctity) that we have acquired over Yom Kippur and the preceding 40 days of growth.

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch notes the Ne'ilah prayer is a recap of the Yom Kippur prayer service and is a message to take with us to serve Hashem in our day to day living.

**The stages of transition:****Shema Yisrael**

In unison we recite the verse : *Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeynu*, Hear O Israel, Hashem, our G-d, Hashem is ONE:

- It is our pledge of allegiance, of loyalty and commitment to the service of Hashem.
- It is our mission statement - in accepting upon ourselves the heavenly yoke, incumbent upon every Jewish man and woman.
- It is a universal truth - of the singularity of our G-d in the universe.

We refer to both Hashem, the tetragrammaton which is noted to refer to the merciful aspect of G-d, as well as to the name *Elokim*, referring to the aspect of Judgement, and we declare - *echad* - they are one. This is especially powerful after a year like this past one!

**Baruch shem kevod malchuto le'olam va'ed**

We recite the phrase *Baruch Shem Kevod*, Blessed is the name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever, three times.

Since we were young, we have been taught to whisper these words, as they belong to the angels. But on Yom Kippur when we are elevated to angelic levels in some ways we are able to say them aloud.

Let us go back to the original utterance of this phrase:

The Midrash in Devarim Rabba tells the story of Moshe ascending to the heavens after the initial events at Har Sinai (when the Jewish People proclaimed their complete devotion to fulfil G-d's word and said - "*Na'aseh venishma* - We will do and we will listen/understand").

While in the heavens, Moshe hearing the angels saying *Baruch shem kevod*, brings these words back to the people. The Midrash describes this phrase that Moshe has brought down with him as a stolen jewel from a palace that should not be worn in public.

Why?

A Midrash in Yechezkel explains the origin of this phrase explaining that it refers to the angelic response when the Jewish people stand true to their mission in the world. The verse in Yechezkel (1:24) states:

תִּרְפְּיָנָה כִּנְפֵיהֶן בְּעֹמְדָם, *when they stand, they let down their wings.*

When who stands? It cannot be referring to the angels, as they are continually "standing." The Midrash Yalkut Shimoni comments that it is impossible for angels to sit, and this phrase must be read differently. "When THEY stand," then, must be referring to when the Jewish people stand (and not the angels). "THEY let down their wings," the wings of the angels are lowered, in a sense, they are silenced. How so? When we declare the Shema accepting the Heavenly Yoke and committing our lives to the words of the

Torah through our free choice and moral freedoms, then the angels respond in admission with this very phrase "*Baruch shem kevod.*" The angels are, in a sense, silenced (as they lower their wings) when we, as humans, dedicate ourselves to the service of Hashem through our free choice as they recognize that they, lacking free choice, cannot attain that level.

The angels recognize that *Malchut Hashem* - G-d's Dominion and Kingdom will ultimately and ideally be recognized in the realm of man and not in the heavenly spheres where they stand tall, but cannot serve Hashem through choice. Mankind fulfilling Divine Will, leads the world to its ultimate purpose, surpassing the level of angels submitting to the Divine Will, as humans serve Hashem by choice while angels lack free choice.

When Moshe brought the phrase *Baruch Shem kevod* down from Heaven, it accurately described our state of being. Having just committed to G-d with the words *na'aseh venishma*, we made the choice to commit to filling the world with the greatest display of Hashem's Kingdom, by fulfilling His Will, The Torah. When Moshe descended to find the Golden Calf, we chose otherwise, and had fallen from the heights of performing Divine Will at that level and lost our rights to utilize the phrase *Baruch Shem kevod*.

Yom Kippur is the appropriate day to highlight this message. It is a supernatural day, highlighting the possibility and accessibility of *teshuvah*. Repentance is also a function of "choice," unique to mankind. After all, our choices create our reality. And think of how many choices, large and small we make each day. Each choice is an opportunity. And *teshuvah*, repentance, is the ability to create a new reality by choosing differently with regards to the past and dissociating oneself from sin, even after the fact. *Teshuvah* too is a function of choice!

We declare aloud *Baruch Shem kevod* three times on Yom Kippur to declare G-d's Kingdom in the present, past and future. This too can be related to the phrase *Baruch Shem*. We stood worthy of the angelic recognition at Har Sinai when we received the Torah, and we stand worthy on Yom Kippur when we abstain from earthly pleasures and immerse ourselves in closeness to G-d as we attain an "angelic" state.

We conclude the day believing that we will again, one day, reach that place where through our choices enable consistent and ultimate realization of the Godly Kingdom in the world. The angels will join as they did in the Midrash in recognizing that it is through our choices and actions, and not by abstaining, that we can bring the greatest glory to G-d in the world.

Each Yom Kippur as we take advantage of our spiritual opportunities, we move one step closer to reaching this goal.

### **Hashem Hu Ha'elokim**

Finally - we say the powerful words *Hashem Hu Ha'Elokim* seven times.

Why seven times? Commentaries explain this represents the escorting Hashem back through the seven heavens He had descended from when He came to meet us during this Yemei Ratzon period. Seven times we declare Hashem is the true G-d. Seven heavens. Seven is a powerful number in Judaism.



Where is this phrase from? It originates in Melachim I Chapter 18 with Eliyahu at Har HaCarmel (*Carmel Mountain*). There is a big showdown between the false prophets of the Ba'al (idolatry) and Eliyahu Hanavi who implores the Jewish people to choose between G-d or the Ba'al and to stop swinging between the two. Eliyahu cries out in verse 21 "If Hashem is the G-d, go after Him, and if the Ba'al, go after him."

What does the nation answer? The verse continues:

דבר ולא ענו העם אותו דבר, *and they did not answer him anything*. There was an awkward silence. Rashi explains: שלא היו יודעים להבחין, *for they did not know how to differentiate*. They could not make choices, because they did not know how to tell the difference between the truth and falsehood, between good and bad. How often do we slip up to a point where we cannot even tell that we are doing something wrong?

Eliyahu asks and G-d performs an open miracle - a flash revelation. The Jews are able to see clearly and differentiate at that moment and choose G-d declaring *Hashem Hu HaElokim* twice. Within just a few verses, sadly they were unable to maintain that closeness to Hashem and falter – the change didn't last.

How then is our Yom Kippur proclamation different? The Jews in the time of Eliyahu chose Hashem in response to an open miracle but did not put in the effort to learn how to differentiate. They chose without investing. When we show up at the conclusion of Yom Kippur we too are choosing, but hope and pray that after 40 days of hard work, introspection, investment and commitment we will be able to sustain a closeness and relationship that we sought out with G-d. We hope it will be a lasting guide to all our choices through the year.

It is interesting to note that once again, as in Shema, we find the two names of G-d used here. The Tetragrammon, Hashem, which represents the aspect of G-d that we experience as *rachamim* or Mercy and the name *Elokim*, which represents the aspect of G-d that we experience as Judgement. At the conclusion of Yom Kippur as we prepare to re-enter the world, we recognize and rejoice that Hashem and *Elokim* are one.

### **Next year in Yerushalayim**

Finally, we then blow the shofar and sing aloud our hope and prayer to be in a rebuilt Jerusalem in the coming year, לשנה הבאה בירושלים. We have been painfully reminded, that while the gates to heaven will be open to us this year, the gates to Yerushalayim may be closed to many of us. This year, more than ever, we have a responsibility to see these words as a possible reality - but only if we so choose.

What better way to conclude our Yom Kippur and transition back into "day to day reality" than to pronounce our belief in Hashem and our commitment to the Torah and restate our belief in ourselves and our ability to be the true subjects of the angelic phrase. It is precisely in our humanity that we bring the greatest glory to G-d's kingdom.