שְׁמַע ה' קוֹלִי אֶקְרָא

"Hear my voice when I call, O Lord." (Ps. 27:7)

Hear My Voice: The YCT Yamim Noraim Reader

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Introduction

Imagining a Better World

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Rosh Hashanah is a *Yom HaDin,* a Day of Judgment. We will stand before God, and God will take measure of our deeds of the past year. This characterization of the day opens and frames the Zikhronot of Musaf: "*Atah zokher ma'aseh olam, u'foked kol yitzurei kedem*," "You, God, remember the deeds of everyone in the world, and recall all those from previous times ... and regarding the countries it will be said which is for sword and which is for peace, which is for hunger and which for abundance, and all creatures are recalled, to be remembered for life or for death." We engage in the process of *teshuvah* because of this impending judgment, assessing our behavior, owning up to our wrongs, feeling true remorse for our sins and misdeeds, and making an honest commitment to act differently in the future.

But there is more to Rosh HaShanah. Rosh HaShanah is also a day of *malkhut*, of God's kingship. The Malkhiot precedes the Zikhronot in Musaf, and it might be seen as defining the essence of the day. Not only in Musaf but in every Shmoneh Esrei from Rosh HaShanah through Yom Kippur, our third blessing changes to "*ha'Melekh ha'Kadosh*," "Blessed are you, God, Holy King." Kingship is also part of the blessing recited over the sanctity of the day of Rosh Hashanah, in Kiddush as well as Shmoneh Esrei: "Blessed are you, God, King over the entire world, Who sanctifies Israel and this Day of Remembrance." Kingship may indeed be a more central theme of Rosh Hashanah than judgment.

It's taken me a while to realize this in a deep way. For many years, I viewed Rosh Hashanah as a Day of Judgment, using kingship merely to frame this conception: to stand before God in judgment can only take place after we recognize God's sovereignty over the world. The focus, however, was *din,* being judged by God and by oneself. This certainly allowed me to connect to the intensity of the day and to have a sense of *eimat ha'din*, fear and awe of the impending judgment. But in some years it led beyond healthy introspection to self-criticism and self-flagellation. This was unhealthy psychologically, religiously, and spiritually. Too much emphasis on *din,* on one's sins and faults, can lead to getting deeper in the muck rather than rising out of it. What would it mean to focus on the theme of kingship instead?

When we speak of God's kingship on Rosh Hashanah, we do so not only in terms of the

past and the present, but most significantly in terms of the future: "*Vi'khein tzadikim yiru v'yismachu*," "And then the righteous will see and rejoice."; "*Al kein n'kaveh*," "therefore we will hope to quickly see in the glory of Your strength." Rosh Hashanah is a day when we imagine what a more perfect world - a more holy world, a more moral world - could look like. It is a day when we strive to envision a world in which God and God's presence can be truly seen and truly felt.

What would happen if our Rosh Hashanah prayers were infused with a yearning for such a world? The answer is obvious: We would be driven to work toward making our vision a reality. We would strive to model this imagined future in our own lives and in our interactions with others. We would seek out opportunities to make a real difference in the world, to bring our world just a little closer to that more perfect, more Godly vision.

Sefat Emet says this beautifully. On Rosh Hashanah, he says, we pray for God to be recognized by all of creation; we pray for a world in which the Divine is more fully realized. But then something amazing happens. When we pray for others, we are answered first. When we work to envision a more perfect world, we will start to see changes taking place in our own lives. Our vision will be, first and foremost, transformative not for others, but for ourselves.

This striving for a more perfect world and working to actualize it can itself be considered a form of *teshuvah*. The classic conception of *teshuvah* is associated with judgment. We are judged by God, and we judge ourselves: Are we living up to our standards? Are our standards high enough? Are they the right ones to have? Can we look at ourselves in the mirror each morning?

But there is also the *teshuvah* associated with kingship. This *teshuvah* says: Spend less time looking in the mirror. Spend more time looking out the window. If you want to change, you need a vision, and not just for yourself. A vision for a better you remains, ultimately, self-centered. The *teshuvah* of kingship requires a vision for the world.

In his famous work, *Orot Hateshuvah*, Lights of Repentance, Rav Kook describes this *teshuvah* in metaphysical terms, as a cosmic yearning of the entire world to achieve a more perfect state. This higher *teshuvah* preceded creation, and it infuses all of creation with an impetus to achieve its fullest potential. In a moving passage from chapter five, Rav Kook writes:

> Every removal of sin resembles the removal of an obstruction from the seeing eye, and a whole new horizon of vision is revealed, the light of vast expanses of heaven and earth and all that is in them. The world must inevitably come to full repentance. The world is not static, but it continues to develop, and a truly full development must bring about the complete state of health, material and spiritual, and this will bring repentance along with it (Ben Zion Bokser, trans.).

Kingship calls on us to see differently, to refuse acceptance of all the problems in the world, our communities, and our personal lives as unfixable givens. It demands that we "remove the obstructions from our eyes," that we see new horizons, that we see the world not as it is, but as it can be.

This approach can give a new understanding to Zikhronot and to what it means to be remembered and to be inscribed.

Alfred Nobel made a fortune from inventing dynamite. A French newspaper mistook the death of Nobel's brother for his own and ran his obituary. The newspaper announced: "The merchant of death is dead." It continued, "Dr. Alfred Nobel, who became rich by finding ways to kill more people faster than ever before, died yesterday." Nobel realized that were he to die at that moment, this was what people would write about him, this was how we would be remembered. He committed himself to redirecting his life and to reshaping his lasting legacy. When he is remembered today, people write about the Nobel Prize and above all, the Nobel Peace Prize.

Zikhronot calls upon us to ask ourselves how we want to be remembered. What do we want to be written about us when we are no longer here? Our vision for the larger world must translate into a vision for ourselves: What will I do to turn my vision for the world into a reality? What must I do differently than I am doing now? What am I doing so that I will be remembered for having done good in my life? This is the work of Zikhronot.

And then we turn to Shofarot. The Rabbis tell us that God says, "Say the Malkhiot to make Me King over you. Say the Zikhronot so that you will be remembered for good. And through what? Through the *shofar*." The shofar is the *kli*, the vessel, which lets us achieve the vision of Malkhiot and of Zikhronot. When we finally have a vision for the world and for ourselves, we must find those vessels, those tools, that will allow us to turn our vision into reality. We must identify the things that we have the capacity to do, the skills that we can develop, and the changes that we can make. And we must know that we are not alone. The shofar is not just an individual *mitzvah*; it is a mitzvah done by the community. We cannot hesitate to turn to others for help, to say to a spouse, friend, or colleague, "I need your help. You can help provide me with the structure, the guidance, the assistance I need to realize my goals." This is the work of Shofarot.

Malkhiot, Zikhronot, Shofarot: a vision for the world, a vision for oneself and one's legacy, and the tools to get it done. Through these, we can start to move closer to that day when *yi'hiyeh Hashem echad u'shmo echad*.

Rosh Hashanah: Today is the Day of Conception

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Every Jewish holiday has a unique character to it. Each year on that specific day, we are invited to step across the threshold, intellectually, and spiritually, and enter into that distinct domain. Rosh Hashanah, traditionally thought of as the day commemorating the creation of the world, is more precisely regarded as the day the world is conceived.

This idea is beautifully captured in the famous *piyut* that we say during *Tefilat Musaf* on Rosh Hashanah, following the shofar blasts: '*Hayom Harat Olam*'—'Today is the day of the conception of the world.' But what does that mean to say that the world is conceived on this day?

The Hasidic master of the Ishbitz-Radzyn dynasty, R. Gershon Hanoch Henich Leiner (1839–1890), offers a new perspective on this ancient theme. He draws a parallel between the creation of the world and the creation of oneself.

'Every year, on this very day, there is a reawakening of the statement, 'Let there be light'... And in comparison to this year, the past year is akin to the destroyed worlds] that existed before this world was created. As the midrash teaches, 'The Holy One Blessed be He built worlds and destroyed them, until He created this world and said, 'This one pleases me; those did not please me.' (Bereishit Rabbah 3:7) …Therefore, each year [on Rosh Hashanah], when there is a stirring of the words 'Let there be light'….' …creation becomes strengthened…' (*Sod Yesharim al haTorah, Rosh Hashanah, Day 1, 5649, s.v. 'v'Hashem paqad et Sarah*)

Every Rosh Hashanah, says R. Gershon Hanoch Henich, there is a rekindling of the primordial light. The person whose soul is attuned to the rhythm of the cycle of Jewish holidays can experience an inner stirring, a reawakening of 'light,' where it is possible to attain a previously unknown level of awareness as if some blockage is suddenly removed or falls away. And so, consciousness—a new conception—can be renewed on this day each year.

Rather than talking about an event that took place long ago in 'history', the notion of the 'conception of the world' is meant to be understood as something that is happening right now in our lives. Time, in this view, is not linear; creation is not just something that happened in the past, but a dynamic cycle unfolding in the world.

In a different *drasha* (homily) Gershon Hanoch Henich's father, R. Ya'akov, suggests that the story of creation recorded in the Book of Genesis, "takes place within every human

being" (*Beit Ya'akov, Bereishit 7*). This dynamic cycle unfolds within each human soul. Just as in the creation of the world, we too begin in chaos, in confusion and uncertainty—in *tohu*—with our shortcomings and flaws until we are stirred to make something of our lives, of ourselves.

Creation and renewal seem to imply starting over completely—leaving behind the old and beginning anew. But our lives are full of memories, ingrained habits and experiences; how are we to start over again? How does the new year's 'new light' relate to our failures, disappointments and unfilled hopes —the *tohu* to which R. Ya'akov referred?

The midrash cited above by R. Gershon Hanoch Henich teaches, "The Holy One Blessed be He built worlds and destroyed them, until he created this world and said, 'This one pleases Me…"

The Sages' description of the destruction and creation of the world needs to be understood as something that happens within ourselves. We too have destroyed worlds within us—those missed opportunities, errors, and outright transgressions that weigh heavily on us as we enter into the New Year.

We could choose to relate to them simplistically and say, 'Just put your past behind you.'

While this may seem tempting, repression is never a real solution; it doesn't work, and it casts a shadow over a person.

There can be no rebuilding without the space to reflect, to regret and cry out from the depths of our being.

Perhaps what we can learn from these *drashot* is to harness our failings. The pain and distress of what we haven't done or what we did wrong—all of our 'destroyed worlds'—provoke undeniable feelings that can cause us to cry out to God.

This plea, emerging from deep within, becomes the new energy that enables us to overcome our failings. Our negative aspects are redeemed. Rosh Hashanah, the day that we stand before the Creator, calls us to this awareness: 'Today the world was conceived.' Conception here is an instance where light emerges out of darkness, order out of chaos, meaning out of confusion as we rebuild our lives.

This year's reality brings these teachings into even sharper focus. We have endured a terribly chaotic year on the national and personal level. Unfortunately, the term, "destroyed worlds" has taken on a new, painful level of meaning.

This year it will not be easy for us to embrace the New Year; we are going to have to work hard to attune ourselves to the 'emerging light,' the *Yehi or*. But if there is one thing I learned over this past year, it is just what remarkably resilient people we are. We experience daily how our nation, from those who are suffering enormous loss to those who help them, and everyone else too, continues to find light in the darkest of places.

As we hear the shofar blasts this year, I hope we won't still be in this war and I pray that the hostages will be returned safely, and that all our wounded will be healed. And I have faith that when we say *Hayom Harat Olam*, 'today the world is conceived,' we will also feel the stirring of the 'emerging light' *Yehi or* coming forth from those previously destroyed worlds, and the light that was hidden until now will bring about a new birth.

Between Humility and Hopefulness *Achot Ketanah*: A Sephardic Rosh HaShanah Piyyut

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In the essay below, I will examine the Sephardic *piyyut* (liturgical song) of *Achot Ketanah* (Little sister). Below is the full *piyyut*. It will be quoted again stanza by stanza.

1] אָחוֹת קְטַנָּה תְּפִלּוֹתֶיהָ
עוֹרְכָה וְעוֹנָה תְּהִלּוֹתֶיהָ
אֵל נָא רְפָא נָא לְמַחֲלוֹתֶיהָ
תִּכְלֶה שָׁנָה וְקִלְלוֹתֶיהָ

2] בְּנֹעַם מִלִּים לְךָ תִּקְרָאֶה
וְשִׁיר וְהִלּוּלִים כִּי לְךָ נָאֶה
עַד מַה תַּעֲלִים עֵינֶךָ וְתִרְאֶה
זָרִים אוֹכְלִים נַחֲלוֹתֶיהָ
תִּכְלֶה שָׁנָה וְקִלְלוֹתֶיהָ

3] רְעֵה אֶת צֹאנְךָ אֲרָיוֹת זֵרוּ
וּשְׁפוֹךְ חֲרוֹנְךָ בָּאוֹמְרִים עָרוּ
וְכַנַּת יְמִינְךָ פָּרְצוּ וְאָרוּ
לֹא הִשְׁאִירוּ עוֹלְלוֹתֶיהָ
תִּכְלֶה שָׁנָה וְקִלְלוֹתֶיהָ

4] מָתַי תַּעֲלֶה בְּתִךְ מִבּוֹר
וּמִבֵּית כֶּלֶא עֵלָּה תִּשְׁבֹּר
וְתַפְלִיא פֶּלֶא בְּצֵאתְךָ כְּגִבּוֹר
לְהָתֵם וְכַלֵּה מַחֲלוֹתֶיהָ
תִּכְלֶה שָׁנָה וְקִלְלוֹתֶיהָ

5] חֵילָהּ קָבְעוּ הַגּוֹי כֻּלּוֹ
וְטוּבָהּ שָׁבְעוּ וּבָזְזוּ אִישׁ לוֹ
וְלִבָּהּ קָרְעוּ וּבְכָל זֹאת לֹא
מִמְּךָ נָעוּ מַעְגְּלוֹתֶיהָ
תִּכְלֶה שָׁנָה וְקִלְלוֹתֶיהָ

6] זְמִירָהּ שָׁבַת וְחִשְׁקָהּ תַּגְבִּיר
לַחְפֹּץ קִרְבַת דּוֹדָהּ וְתַעֲבִיר
מִלֵּב דַּאֲבַת נַפְשָׁהּ וְתָסִיר/וְתָעִיר
לְבַקֵּשׁ אַהֲבַת כְּלוּלוֹתֶיהָ
תִּכְלֶה שָׁנָה וְקִלְלוֹתֶיהָ

7] נָחֶה בְּנַחַת לִנְוֵה רִבְצָהּ
רַב נִזְנַחַת מִדּוֹד חֻפְצָהּ
וְהִיא כְּפֹרַחַת עָלְתָה נִצָּהּ
לֹא הִבְשִׁילוּ אַשְׁכְּלוֹתֶיהָ
תִּכְלֶה שָׁנָה וְקִלְלוֹתֶיהָ

8] חִזְקוּ וְגִילוּ כִּי שֹׂד גָּמַר
לְצוּר הוֹחִילוּ בְּרִיתוֹ שָׁמַר
לָכֶם וְתַעֲלוּ לְצִיּוֹן וְאָמַר
סֹלּוּ סֹלּוּ מְסִלּוֹתֶיהָ
תָּחֵל שָׁנָה וּבִרְכוֹתֶיהָ

Introduction

I vividly recall the time I first listened deeply to the *piyyut*, *Achot Ketanah*. It was in

Jerusalem 25 years ago. I had joined my father for the evening Rosh Hashanah services at the former Chief Rabbi of Israel Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu's shul. When the chazzan began chanting the song in its Yerushalmi melody,[1] we looked at each, both of us listening in sheer pleasure and spiritual bliss. The melody was deep and stirring with sharp dips and rises; the lyrics multi-layered, overflowing with meaning. Like Kol Nidrei chanted in Ashkenazic synagogues which opens the prayers of Yom Kippur, *Achot Ketanah*, which opens the Rosh Hashanah prayers for the Sephardic community, sets the tone for the day and for the entire High Holiday season.

What is this *piyyut* and why was it chosen to open the Rosh Hashanah prayer service? The song is thought by many to have been composed by the 13th century Spanish poet and scholar, Avraham Chazan of Gerona. The song is composed of eight stanzas (in many versions, nine stanzas). The first seven stanzas end with the repeating prayer for the outgoing year: "Let the year and its curses conclude" (תִּכְלֶה שָׁנָה וְקִלְלוֹתֶיהָ). The final stanza ends with words that sound similar but ask God for the opposite: "Let the year and its blessings begin" (תָּחֵל שָׁנָה וּבִרְכוֹתֶיהָ). The song employs varied forms of imagery in describing the Jewish people and their plight at the hand of their enemies: the land devoured by oppressors (stanza 2); flock attacked by lions and a plundered vine (stanza 3). The nation is described as sister (stanza 1), daughter (stanza 4) and spouse (stanzas 6 & 7).

The *piyyut*, with its rich imagery, petitions Hashem to forgive and rescue the Jewish people. It concludes with an optimistic message of return to Hashem and to our homeland. The Sephardic community begins the holiday with this song to arouse Divine mercy from the very onset of the High Holiday season. Its messages of hope and return are meant to inspire the community to *teshuvah* and heartfelt prayer.

First Stanza

אָחוֹת קְטַנָּה תְּפִלּוֹתֶיהָ
עוֹרְכָה וְעוֹנָה תְּהִלּוֹתֶיהָ
אֵל נָא רְפָא נָא לְמַחֲלוֹתֶיהָ
תִּכְלֶה שָׁנָה וְקִלְלוֹתֶיהָ

The opening words: "little sister (אָחוֹת קְטַנָּה) form the title of the *piyyut*. These words are borrowed from *Shir Hashirim* 8:8: "We have a little sister who has no breasts; what shall we do for our sister on the day she is spoken for?" The following midrash seems to have inspired the composer, Avraham Chazan:

"We have a little sister"—this is Israel. Rabbi Azarya said in the name of Rabbi Yehuda bar Rabbi Simon: In the future, all the princes of the nations of the world are destined to come and denounce Israel before the Holy One blessed be He and say, 'Master of the universe, these engaged in idol worship and those engaged in idol worship; these engaged in licentiousness and those engaged in licentiousness; these shed blood and those shed blood. Why, then, are these descending into Gehenna and those not descending?'

The Holy One blessed be He will say to them: '"We have a little sister"—just as with a child, no matter what they do no one reprimands them; why? because it is a child, similarly, to whatever extent Israel is tainted by their iniquities all the days of the year, Yom Kippur

comes and atones for them, as it is stated: "For on this day He shall atone for you." (*Shir Hashirim Rabbah* 8:8)

The *piyyut* offers five reasons for Hashem to remove the curses of the previous year and begin a new year filled with blessing. Each of the first five stanzas puts forward a separate argument. In the first stanza we ask Hashem to see us as innocent children. While we have sinned, we ask Hashem to suspend judgment, just as a parent would with a young child.

The continuation of the stanza speaks to the intentionality of the little sister, a theme that will be fully fleshed out in the fifth stanza. The little sister comes prepared with prayers that she passionately calls out to Hashem: (עוֹרְכָה וְעוֹנָה תְּהִלּוֹתֶיהָ). The poet then asks Hashem to heal the sister with the same words Moshe used when he prayed to heal his own sister, Miriam: "God, please heal her" (אֵ-ל נָא רְפָא נָא לָהּ: Numbers 12:13). The song then asks Hashem to conclude the year of curses. This year especially we are in need of such prayers. It's been a tragic year for all of us, filled with pain and suffering. The song asks Hashem to end this negative stream of events and provide us with hope for a brighter future.

Second Stanza

בְּנֹעַם מִלִּים לְךָ תִּקְרָאֶה
וְשִׁיר וְהִלּוּלִים כִּי לְךָ נָאֶה
עַד מַה תַּעֲלִים עֵינֶךָ וְתִרְאֶה
זָרִים אוֹכְלִים נַחֲלוֹתֶיהָ
תִּכְלֶה שָׁנָה וְקִלְלוֹתֶיהָ

In the second stanza we ask for mercy based on our vulnerability and endangered status at the hand of our oppressors. The second stanza opens where the first stanza left off, praising the prayer habits of the little sister. It then asks Hashem directly: "How long will you overlook her fate" (עַד מַה תַּעֲלִים עֵינֶךָ)? "See how strangers devour her heritage" (וְתִרְאֶה זָרִים אוֹכְלִים נַחֲלוֹתֶיהָ)! The song speaks of the little sister as property that has been invaded and consumed by her enemies. Like a helpless and innocent child, the Jewish nation cannot always defend herself. In every generation our enemies rise upon us to destroy us. We ask Hashem to not overlook our struggles and swiftly save us.

Third Stanza

רְעֵה אֶת צֹאנְךָ אֲרָיוֹת זֵרוּ
וּשְׁפוֹךְ חֲרוֹנְךָ בָּאוֹמְרִים עָרוּ
וְכַנַּת יְמִינְךָ פָּרְצוּ וְאָרוּ
לֹא הִשְׁאִירוּ עוֹלְלוֹתֶיהָ
תִּכְלֶה שָׁנָה וְקִלְלוֹתֶיהָ

Stanza three speaks to Hashem's direct connection to the Jewish people: "Tend to your flock that the lions have dispersed" (רְעֵה אֶת צֹאנְךָ אֲרָיוֹת זֵרוּ). This is *your* flock, Hashem, that has been dispersed! By lions, no less. Please, don't just see our affliction (the plea in the second stanza); take the next step and embrace your flock as any good shepherd would.

The second part of the stanza describes the Children of Israel as Hashem's vineyard: "They invaded the vineyard you planted with your right hand, gathered its fruit, and didn't leave any behind (כַּנַּת יְמִינְךָ פָּרְצוּ וְאָרוּ לֹא הִשְׁאִירוּ עוֹלְלוֹתֶיהָ). [This line alludes to Psalms 80:13-16]. Here too the plea is personal: this is *Your* vineyard; You planted it Yourself! If our innocence and vulnerability are not enough to merit Divine mercy, perhaps the fact that we are Hashem's flock and

vineyard, the work of God's hand, will move the needle in our favor.

Fourth Stanza

מָתַי תַּעֲלֶה בִּתְּךָ מִבּוֹר
וּמִבֵּית כֶּלֶא עֶלָּהּ תִּשְׁבּוֹר
וְתַפְלִיא פֶּלֶא בְּצֵאתְךָ כְּגִבּוֹר
לְהָתֵם וְכַלֵּה מַחֲלוֹתֶיהָ
תִּכְלֶה שָׁנָה וְקִלְלוֹתֶיהָ

In the fourth stanza the author attempts to convince Hashem to lift Hashem's daughter from the pit and break her out of jail: (מָתַי תַּעֲלֶה בִּתְּךָ מִבּוֹר וּמִבֵּית כֶּלֶא עֶלָּהּ תִּשְׁבּוֹר). By bringing an end to the daughter's plight, the poet argues, Hashem will be a hero: (וְתַפְלִיא פֶּלֶא בְּצֵאתְךָ כְּגִבּוֹר לְהָתֵם וְכַלֵּה מַחֲלוֹתֶיהָ). This is one more form of persuasion. As Rosh Hashanah begins, we do not hold back any type of entreaty for Divine assistance. If not for us, Hashem, do it for Your sake!

Fifth Stanza

חֵילָהּ קָבְעוּ הַגּוֹי כֻּלּוֹ
וְטוּבָהּ שָׁבְעוּ וּבָזְזוּ אִישׁ לוֹ
וְלִבָּהּ קָרְעוּ וּבְכָל זֹאת לֹא
מִמְּךָ נָעוּ מַעְגְּלוֹתֶיהָ
תִּכְלֶה שָׁנָה וְקִלְלוֹתֶיהָ

The fifth stanza brings us back to the little sister's loyalty described in the first stanza: "The whole nation has fallen prey to the thievery of our enemies" (חֵילָהּ קָבְעוּ הַגּוֹי כֻּלּוֹ). "They satiated themselves with our goods, each one plundering for themselves" (וְטוּבָהּ שָׁבְעוּ וּבָזְזוּ אִישׁ לוֹ). "They tore open the nation of Israel's heart" (וְלִבָּהּ קָרְעוּ). "Nevertheless, the nation did not swerve from your ways" (וּבְכָל זֹאת לֹא מִמְּךָ נָעוּ מַעְגְּלוֹתֶיהָ).

As we witnessed this year, when our enemies try to tear open our hearts, what emerges is greater strength. When tragedy struck on October 7th, we grew more united and stronger as a nation. This is Avraham Chazan's fifth line of argument. Hashem, see how the nation, despite being robbed, pillaged, and abused, remains faithful to you, they haven't swerved from your ways. In response, please act faithfully and forgive your nation!

The final stanzas

זְמִירָהּ שָׂבַת וְחִשְׁקָהּ תַּגְבִּיר
לַחְפֹּץ קִרְבַת דּוֹדָהּ וְתַעֲבִיר
מִלֵּב דַּאֲבַת נַפְשָׁהּ וְתָסִיר/וְתָעִיר
לְבַקֵּשׁ אַהֲבַת כְּלוּלוֹתֶיהָ
תִּכְלֶה שָׁנָה וְקִלְלוֹתֶיהָ

נָחֳהָ בְּנַחַת לִנְוֵה רִבְצָהּ
רַב נִזְנַחַת מִדּוֹד חֻפְצָהּ
וְהִיא כְּפֹרַחַת עָלְתָה נִצָּהּ
לֹא הִבְשִׁילוּ אַשְׁכְּלוֹתֶיהָ
תִּכְלֶה שָׁנָה וְקִלְלוֹתֶיהָ

חִזְקוּ וְגִילוּ כִּי שֹׂד גָּמַר
לְצוּר הוֹחִילוּ בְּרִיתוֹ שָׁמַר
לָכֶם וְתַעֲלוּ לְצִיּוֹן וְאָמַר
סֹלּוּ סֹלּוּ מְסִלּוֹתֶיהָ
תָּחֵל שָׁנָה וּבִרְכוֹתֶיהָ

After putting forth arguments for the liberation of Israel, the *piyyut* looks forward toward a more positive future. One can read the sixth through eighth stanzas as one unit, describing the gradual redemption of the Jewish nation. In stanzas six and seven, the imagery shifts from a sister and a daughter to a spouse. The nation is no longer young and helpless but stands, instead, on more equal footing with her beloved.

In the sixth stanza, the poet notes the inner passion of the Jewish people to draw close to her beloved, and asks Hashem to strengthen this inner drive: (וְחִשְׁקָהּ תַּגְבִּיר לַחְפֹּץ קִרְבַת דּוֹדָהּ). We then ask Hashem to heal the nation's aching heart: (וְתַעֲבִיר מִלֵּב דַּאֲבַת נַפְשָׁהּ); to awaken her and return to the love of her bridal days: (וְתָּעִיר לְבַקֵּשׁ אַהֲבַת כְּלוּלוֹתֶיהָ). [An allusion to Jeremiah 2:2]. Gone is the torment from the nations and the helplessness of the vulnerable sister. Instead, we find love and connection though Divine assistance is still required in the relationship.

In the seventh stanza, the poet returns to the yearning of the Jewish people to cleave to Hashem: "For so long her passion for her loved one has been neglected" (רַב נִזְנַחַת מְדוֹד חֶפְצָהּ). The poet then asks Hashem to gently guide the nation to its place of pasture, the land of Israel (נְחֶהָ בְּנַחַת לִנְוֵה רִבְצָהּ).

The song borrows language from Pharaoh's butler's dream in Genesis, chapter 40. In the butler's dream, the vine's tendrils begin to blossom, its buds emerge and the clusters then ripen into grapes. In our song, there is blossoming: (וְהִיא כְּפֹרַחַת עָלְתָה נִצָּהּ) but the grapes have yet begun to ripen (לֹא הִבְשִׁילוּ אַשְׁכְּלוֹתֶיהָ). The reunion of the lovers has begun but it is not yet complete. The love has blossomed but not yet ripened. The curses are slowly lifting but the full blessing has yet to rest on the nation.

Full reconciliation is the theme of the final stanza: "Be strong and rejoice for the plunder is ended; in the Rock they placed hope and they guarded His covenant. You will ascend to Zion and He will say: Pave! Pave her paths. Let the year and its blessings begin!"

The *piyyut* of *Achot Ketanah* begins with an innocent little child and concludes with Hashem paving the path for a reunion with the Jewish people, God's beloved. *Achot Ketanah* reminds us that there is hope. Beyond the afflictions and pain, forgiveness and salvation await Hashem's nation. A year of curses will pass and a new year filled with blessings will begin. May this come true for us in our days. May we merit a year full of blessing, safety, security, and happiness.

Footnotes

[1] A recording of the Yerushalmi version by Cantor Moshe Habusha can be found here: https://bit.ly/achotketanah. I thank Chazzan Gilad Kedar for bringing this cantorial piece to my attention.

Hashiveinu: A Bold Demand or a Desperate Plea

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Toward the conclusion of the Selichot service, and embedded in the Yom Kippur liturgy is the prayer, *Shema Koleinu*. This prayer is a plea to Hashem not to forsake us and the sentences express an admission that God is in control and that humans are almost powerless in God's presence. We beg God to hear our voices and not to abandon us in our moments of weakness.

אַל תַּשְׁלִיכֵנוּ מִלְּפָנֶיךָ וְרוּחַ קָדְשְׁךָ אַל תִּקַּח מִמֶּנּוּ

Cast us not away from Your Presence; and Your holy spirit take not from us.

אַל תַּעַזְבֵנוּ ה' אֱלֹקינוּ אַל תִּרְחַק מִמֶּנּוּ

Forsake us not, God, our God; be not far removed from us.

One phrase seems out of place; incompatible with the overall message of supplication. This verse from Lamentations 5:21, requests God to take action first and only then will we follow suit. This is an expression of human agency absent from the rest of the prayer.

הֲשִׁיבֵנוּ ה' אֵלֶיךָ וְנָשׁוּבָה חַדֵּשׁ יָמֵינוּ כְּקֶדֶם׃

Return us to You, God, and we shall find the way back; renew our days as of old.

Midrash Eicha Rabbah 5:21 elaborates, elevating the request to a demand.

The Congregation of Israel said before the Holy One blessed be He: 'Master of the universe, **it is incumbent upon You to return us**.'

He said to them: 'It is incumbent upon you, as it is stated: "Return to Me and then I shall return to you, said the Lord" (Malachi 3:7).'

[The Jewish people] responded before Him: 'Master of the universe, it is incumbent upon You, as it is stated: "Return us, God of our salvation" (Psalms 85:5).'

That is why it is stated: "Return us to You, Lord, and we will return."

Ultimately, according to this midrash, the final word belongs to the children of Israel; it is God who must initiate.

The midrash highlights the question: Why did the authors of *Shema Koleinu* see fit to include this verse, a seemingly chutzpadik expression of human agency, in an otherwise supplicatory plea? The question is heightened when one considers the overall placement of *Shema Koleinu* in the liturgy. *Shema Koleinu* is the precursor to the Vidui, the section in which we confess our sins and admit our wrongdoings. Pleading with God not to abandon us despite our missteps seems reasonable. Suggesting, shortly before confessing our sins, that we will

return to God **only** if God initiates seems inappropriate at best. Would it not be better for us to take the initial steps toward *teshuvah* and ask God to guide us or shepard us along the way?

Perhaps the answer lies in a different understanding of the verse, one that views the Jewish people as shattered and on the brink of hopelessness. The verse of *Hashiveinu* is from *Eicha* (Lamentations 5:21) and appears among verses expressing the notion that God has abandoned the Jewish people. In this context, *Hashiveinu* reads less like a demand and more as a desperate cry for a helping hand to raise us up from despair. 'Return us, Hashem, because we simply cannot begin to find the way back on our own.'

This read of *Hashiveinu* is reminiscent of the Talmudic statement:

אֵין חָבוּשׁ מַתִּיר עַצְמוֹ מִבֵּית הָאֲסוּרִים.

A prisoner cannot free himself from prison. *(Tractate Brachot 5b)*

This expression appears in a story in the Talmud in which Rabbi Yochanan, who was ill, needed Rabbi Chanina to give him a hand to help him stand up. Rabbi Yochanan had raised Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba when he fell ill, so the Talmud is puzzled that Rabbi Yochanan cannot raise himself. The expression above is the explanation given by the Talmud. In this expression the term *chavush* means "prisoner," but it has a more general meaning of "one who is bound." Thus, *chavush* could mean physical captivity but can also be extended to include those who are emotionally, mentally, or spiritually stuck. The Talmud is teaching us that there are times when we are unable to initiate our own salvation and we require someone else to go first.

The verse of *Hashiveinu* is well suited for both *Eicha* and *Shema Koleinu.* In both cases, we are expressing to God our heartfelt desire to do *teshuvah*, to return and to better ourselves, but we do not know where to begin. Only through God's guidance and sustained relationship with us will we find our way.

This year, the echoes of *Eicha* amidst our High Holiday liturgy resonate with awful power and clarity. We are approaching a full year of *Eicha*—***How?!*** How could the nightmare of October 7 and its aftermath have happened? How can there be so much loss and suffering? How will people ever be able to return to their homes? How can there still be hostages imprisoned after so many days of darkness? How can parents, children, spouses and friends carry on in life with their loved ones missing, injured or gone? *Eicha*, God have you abandoned us? Have our worst fears come to pass, the sentiments we give expression to in *Shema Koleinu*?

Perhaps some of them have.

However, the *Eicha*/despair narrative is only a part of the picture. We cannot lament Israel's present woes without also marveling at the superhuman courage, resilience and resourcefulness of her people and her supporters. The note of utter astonishment expressed by *Eicha* deserves to be applied to the unprecedented strength, generosity and courage that became part of the story of the aftermath of October 7. How can kindness overflow with such abundance? How can we feel so much love for people we have never met simply because we are all part of the

Jewish people? How can we feel such an unwavering connection for a land in which we do not currently reside? Let our *Eicha* astonishment encompass the good as well as the bad.

Towards that end, as we recite *Hashiveinu* this year, we do well to recall a contemporary iteration of this tefillah by Naomi Shemer:

אַל נָא תַּעֲקֹר נָטוּעַ,
אַל תִּשְׁכַּח אֶת הַתִּקְוָה
הֲשִׁיבֵנִי וְאָשׁוּבָה
אֶל הָאָרֶץ הַטוֹבָה.

Don't uproot what has been planted
Don't forget the hope
Lead me home, and I will return
To the good land.

Shemer invokes *Hashiveinu* as a call for *teshuvah*—return—not as repentance, but as return to "the good land" (*ha'aretz hatovah)*. This biblical phrase refers to the Land of Israel but it can also mean "the land of goodness." Israel is not merely a place of physical beauty. Israel is where Divine goodness is expressed in the loving hearts and hands which guide us through the darkness and terror. It is to this place that we long to return, with God's help, more than ever in 5785.

May God respond to our prayers, especially now when they come from a place of such desperation. May we find moments when we feel secure enough not to wait for God, but to start our process of return on our own.

And, may we find strength this New Year to remember the immense goodness of the gift of Medinat Yisrael and the awe-inspiring goodness of her people.

Memory and Pekidah

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ראש השנה מופיע במקורות כיום תרועה וכיום זיכרון, וכידוע אחד משלושת הסדרים בתפילת המוסף של ראש השנה הוא זיכרונות. אנו מתפללים ומבקשים שה' יזכרנו לטובה, ומזכירים את זכות אבותינו שעמדו בניסיונות לא פשוטים. גם השבת שלפני פורים היא שבת זכור, בה אנו זוכרים את עמלק ומעשיו לעם ישראל.

לצערנו בשנה האחרונה נפגשנו פנים אל פנים מול עמלק שבדורנו, בשמחה-תורה, הששון הפך לאסון. האסון שהוביל לגדולה וגבורה צבאית, אזרחית וקהילתית.

אנו קוראים בתורה בראש השנה את ניסיון העקידה, אך הקריאה מתחילה בקיום הבטחתו של ה' לאברהם: "וַה' פָּקַד אֶת שָׂרָה כַּאֲשֶׁר אָמָר וַיַּעַשׂ ה' לְשָׂרָה כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֵּר". למילה "פקד" קיימות מספר משמעויות בשפה: זכירה, האל זוכר את הבטחתו. פקודה, מלשון הוראה לביצוע, כפי שבאה לידי ביטוי במיוחד בשפה הצבאית, וכן פקד מלשון מפקד, ספירה של האנשים. ספר במדבר

Translated by Yaffa Aaronoff.

In the Torah, Rosh Hashanah appears as a day of remembrance and as a day of *truah*. The middle of the three sections of Rosh Hashanah musaf service is called "*Zichronot*" (remembrances). We pray to God to remember us for the good, and we recall the merit of our ancestors who faced difficult trials and challenges. The theme of remembering comes up again on the Shabbat before Purim, Shabbat Zachor (the Sabbath of Remembrance), when we remember Amalek and his actions against the People of Israel. Unfortunately, in the past year, we faced the Amalek of our generation on Simchat Torah, when tragedy befell us. In the wake of this tragedy, we experienced great military, civilian and communal heroism

On Rosh Hashanah we read in the Torah of the Binding of Isaac. However, the reading begins with a verse describing the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham: " Hashem remembered (***pakad***) Sarah as promised, and Hashem did for Sarah what had been announced.” (Bereishit 21:1). The word "*pakad*" has multiple meanings in Hebrew: **remembrance**, as in God remembering His promise; **command**, as in giving an order for execution, commonly used in military language; and **count**, as in counting people. In Sefer Devarim (the Book of Numbers), which is also called "*Chumash* ***HaPekudim***" (the Book of Counting), the census of the people of Israel takes place before they go out to war.

נקרא חומש הפקודים כיוון שבו נאמר שמונים את עם ישראל לפני יציאתם למלחמה. הקב"ה מונה שוב ושוב את ישראל כפי שרש"י מפרש: "מתוך חיבתם מונה אותם". משמעויות אלו משתלבות היטב בקיום הבטחתו של ה' לאברהם ולשרה שביצחק יקרא להם זרע. במסכת ראש השנה נאמר שבראש השנה עצמו נפקדה שרה. הקב"ה זוכר את שרה והיא הרה ומולידה את יצחק. כפי שאנו מתפללים בתפילת מוסף: "היום הרת עולם".

ההפטרה גם היא עוסקת בלידתו של שמואל. בסיפור זה מופיעה המילה פקד בהמשך הפרק, כפי שכתוב: "וּבֵרַךְ עֵלִי אֶת אֶלְקָנָה וְאֶת אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאָמַר יָשֵׂם ה' לְךְ זֶרַע מִן הָאִשָּׁה הַזֹּאת תַּחַת הַשְּׁאֵלָה אֲשֶׁר שָׁאַל לַה' וְהָלְכוּ לִמְקֹמוֹ. כִּי פָקַד ה' אֶת חַנָּה וַתַּהַר וַתֵּלֶד שְׁלֹשָׁה בָנִים וּשְׁתֵּי בָנוֹת וַיִּגְדַּל הַנַּעַר שְׁמוּאֵל עִם ה'". כלומר, הפרשה וההפטרה מדגישים את ההיריון והלידה כרעיון של התחלה חדשה והתחדשות.

בסוף ספר בראשית מופיעה הבטחה חשובה שתתגלה מאוחר יותר בספר שמות אודות הפקודה. הספר מסתיים במות יוסף במצרים, כאשר הוא מבקש מאחיו וצאצאיו שיעלו את עצמותיו לישראל "וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל אֶחָיו אָנֹכִי מֵת וֵאלֹקִים פָּקֹד יִפְקֹד אֶתְכֶם וְהֶעֱלָה אֶתְכֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וּלְיַעֲקֹב". יוסף משתמש במילים: "פָּקֹד יִפְקֹד", אותה הבטחה שה' הבטיח וקיים עבור שרה

God counts Bnei Yisrael again and again. As Rashi explains—out of His love for them, He counts them. All of the above denotations of ***pakad*** fit perfectly with God's promise to Abraham and Sarah that Isaac would be their offspring.

As taught in Masechet Rosh Hashanah, Sarah was remembered by God on Rosh Hashanah itself, and as a result, she became pregnant and gave birth to Isaac. This is reflected in the Musaf prayer, where we say: "Today, the world was conceived."

If we turn to the Haftarah, we see that it likewise discusses the birth of a long-awaited child: Shmuel. In the story, the word ***pakad*** appears when Eli blesses Elkanah and Chanah:

> May Hashem grant you offspring by this woman in place of the loan she made to Hashem." Then they would return home. For Hashem remembered (***pakad***) Hannah; she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters. Young Samuel meanwhile grew up in the service of Hashem. (1 Samuel 2:20-1).

Both the Torah reading and the Haftarah of Rosh Hashanah use the stirring imagery of pregnancy and birth to convey the themes of renewal and new starts.

At the end of Sefer Bereishit, a historic promise is made concerning the word ***pakad***, which reaches fulfillment in Sefer Shemot. The first book of the Torah ends with Joseph's death and his final request of his brothers and descendants to take his bones with them to Israel:

> At length, Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die. Hashem will surely take notice of you (***pakod yifkod***) and bring you up from this land to the land promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." So Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "When God has taken notice of you (***pakod yifkod***), you shall carry up my bones from here." (Bereishit 50:54-5)

Joseph uses the same language of ***pakad*** that Hashem used fulfilling the promise of offspring to Sara and Abraham. Joseph is instilling in his brothers and their and his own descendants faith in the eventual Exodus.

Sefer Shemot, the Book of Redemption, opens with the Egyptian exile and enslavement. When God appears in the Burning Bush to Moshe and appoints him to lead Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt, God says to him:

"Go and assemble the elders of Israel and say to them: Hashem, the God of your fathers' [house]—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—has appeared to me and said, 'I have taken note of you (***pakod pakaditi***) and of what is being done to you in Egypt." (Shemot 3:16)

When commissioning Moshe to lead Bnei Yisrael in their redemption, Hashem uses the same language of ***pakad*** spoken by Joseph. When Moshe comes to the elders of Israel and shows them the signs from God, "the assembly was convinced. When they heard that Hashem had taken note (***ki fakad***) of Bnei Yisrael and that [God] had seen their plight, they bowed low in homage." (Shemot 4:31) God fulfilled a promise of ***pakad*** to Sarah, and now God will fulfill the same promise to Bnei Yisrael.

Moshe, at the moment of redemption, of the Exodus from Egypt, remembers the oath that Joseph's brothers took and takes Joseph's bones with him:

And Moses took with him the bones of Joseph, who had exacted an oath from the children of Israel, saying, "God will be sure to remember you (***pakod yifkod***): then you shall carry up my bones from here with you." (Shemot 13:19)

Redemption comes about through the fulfillment of God's promise to Sarah and the oath requested by Joseph and fulfilled by Moshe. There is an important message here: Moshe takes care of Joseph's bones on the way to Bnei Yisrael's redemption. The concept of "*Chesed Shel Emet*" (true kindness, the kindness we give to the deceased, from whom we can never expect recompense) accompanies us throughout our history as a people and is something that we experienced poignantly in the past year. Beyond my own personal knowledge of the reverential, sensitive, and professional treatment that the fallen soldiers and their families

ואברהם, יוסף אומר לאחיו וזרעו לעתיד. ספר שמות, ספר הגאולה, פותח בגלות בשעבוד מצרים. כשה' מתגלה למשה בסנה ומטיל עליו את השליחות להוציא את בני ישראל ממצרים, ה' אומר למשה: "לֵךְ וְאָסַפְתָּ אֶת זִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם ה' אֱלֹקי אֲבֹתֵיכֶם נִרְאָה אֵלַי אֱלֹקי אַבְרָהָם יִצְחָק וְיַעֲקֹב לֵאמֹר פָּקֹד פָּקַדְתִּי אֶתְכֶם וְאֶת הֶעָשׂוּי לָכֶם בְּמִצְרָיִם". בשבועת הגאולה של יוסף, ה' מצווה את משה. כשמשה מגיע לזקני ישראל ומראה להם את האותות מה' נאמר: "וַיַּאֲמֵן הָעָם וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ כִּי פָקַד ה' אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכִי רָאָה אֶת עָנְיָם וַיִּקְּדוּ וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲווּ". ה' פקד את שרה ועכשיו הוא פוקד את בני ישראל.

בשעת יציאת מצרים, שעת הגאולה, משה לא שוכח את שבועתו של יוסף והוא מעלה את עצמות יוסף: "וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת עַצְמוֹת יוֹסֵף עִמּוֹ כִּי הַשְׁבֵּעַ הִשְׁבִּיעַ אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר פָּקֹד יִפְקֹד אֱלֹקים אֶתְכֶם וְהַעֲלִיתֶם אֶת עַצְמֹתַי מִזֶּה אִתְּכֶם". הגאולה עוברת דרך קיום ההבטחה של ה' לשרה וקיום השבועה של יוסף על-ידי משה. יש בכך מסר חשוב מאוד ונוסף, משה מתעסק עם עצמות יוסף בדרך לגאולה.

'חסד של אמת' מלווה אותנו לאורך כל ההיסטוריה שלנו כעם ואנו חווינו זאת בצורה משמעותית מאוד בשנה האחרונה. מעבר לידיעה האישית של המשפחות כי אנשים ראויים טיפלו

received, there is a greater point to be emphasized here. The *Chesed shel Emet* that we bestow upon the fallen soldiers of Israel's wars is important for us as a nation, as those who perpetuate the path of Moshe Rabeinu toward redemption. And even as we face the future and look forward to tikkun olam, we still are committed to the oath of bringing our brothers and sisters' bones back to Eretz Yisrael for burial.

This *pekidah* or duty is not only connected to the past, but it is also a *pekidah* for the future. When Moshe considers the future of Bnei Yisrael when he is no longer able to lead them, he asks Hashem to appoint a suitable leader:

> Moses spoke to Hashem, saying, "Let Hashem, Source of the breath of all flesh, appoint (***yifkod***) someone over the community who shall go out before them and come in before them, and who shall take them out and bring them in, so that Hashem's community may not be like sheep that have no shepherd." (Bemidbar 27:16-17)

Moshe asks Hashem to be *poked* on Bnei Yisrael a new leader so that they not be like sheep without a shepherd. A shepherd does not only drive the flock out into the field and back again but also counts and cares for each and every sheep, for each one is important to the flock. This is one of the essential messages of Rosh Hashanah, when both the individual and the community as a whole are judged: "As a shepherd that counts his flock, passing them under his staff."

When we blow the shofar, we are *poked* Hashem and ask that Hashem remember us for the good and have mercy on us. We pray that mercy will overcome judgment and that we be blessed with a better and good new year. Just as the *pekidah* began with the past (Sara, Yosef, Exodus from Egypt) and ends with hope for the future (Moshe's prayer for the right leader to replace him), we pray that the shofar ushers in the attribute of mercy to overcome the attribute of judgment.

ביקירם בכבוד, ברגישות ובמקצועיות, ההתעסקות עם חללי מערכות ישראל חשובה גם בהיבט הציבורי כממשיכי דרכו של משה רבנו ביציאה לגאולה. גם כשפנינו קדימה לתיקון עולם, אנו עדיין מקיימים את השבועה להעלות את עצמות עמינו ואחינו לקבר ישראל.

פקידה זו אינה רק ציווי הקשור בעבר, של קיום הבטחות מהדורות הקודמים. אלא היא גם ציווי לעתיד. כשמשה צריך לדאוג לעתיד, ליום שלאחריו, הוא צריך למנות מנהיג חדש לעם ישראל לפני מותו וכך ה' מצווה אותו:" וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה אֶל ה' לֵאמֹר. יִפְקֹד ה' אֱלֹקֵי הָרוּחֹת לְכָל בָּשָׂר אִישׁ עַל הָעֵדָה. אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא לִפְנֵיהֶם וַאֲשֶׁר יָבֹא לִפְנֵיהֶם וַאֲשֶׁר יוֹצִיאֵם וַאֲשֶׁר יְבִיאֵם וְלֹא תִהְיֶה עֲדַת ה' כַּצֹּאן אֲשֶׁר אֵין לָהֶם רֹעֶה". רועה הצאן אינו רק מנהיג את עדרו, אלא גם סופר ומונה את צאנו, כי כל פרט ופרט חשוב בעדר. זהו גם עיקרו של ראש השנה בו נידונים הכלל והפרט: "כבקרת רועה עדרו המעביר צאנו תחת שבטו".

בתקיעת השופר אנו מזכירים, פוקדים לה' שיזכור לנו את הטוב ומדת הרחמים ויתעלם מהמוטב ומדת הדין. אנו מתפללים שהרחמים יעלו על הדינים ונזכה לשנה טובה וברוכה יותר. כשם שהפקידה התחילה עם זיכרון העבר ומסתיימת עם תקווה לעתיד, אנו תפילה שהשופר יעביר את מידת הגבורה למידת החסד. כנבואתו של ירמיהו על העתיד ומשתמש גם בלשון

Jeremiah too prophesied about the future and used the language of "*pakad*":

Ah, shepherds who let the flock of My pasture stray and scatter!—declares GOD. Assuredly, thus said the Eternal, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who should tend My people: It is you who let My flock scatter and go astray. You gave no thought (***lo fakaditem***) to them, but I am going to give thought (***foked***) to you, for your wicked acts—declares GOD.

And I Myself will gather the remnant of My flock from all the lands to which I have banished them, and I will bring them back to their pasture, where they shall be fertile and increase… In his days Judah shall be delivered and Israel shall dwell secure. And this is the name by which he shall be called: "GOD is our Vindicator." (Jeremiah 23:1-6).

The coming together and the unity of the nation, overcoming dispersal and fragmentation, are the basis for redemption and a better future.

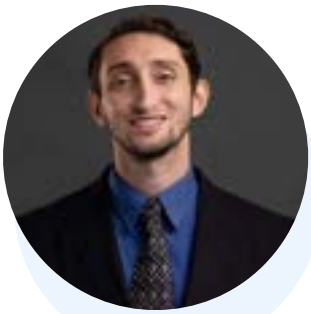
With the special sound of the shofar that we will hear this year, we will remember and we will *poked* what we have been through. We will remember our brothers and sisters who sacrificed their lives for our sake. Through the sound of the shofar, we will pray for a better *pekuda* for the coming year that we hope will be one of blessed renewal.

פקד: "הוֹי רֹעִים מְאַבְּדִים וּמְפִצִים אֶת צֹאן מַרְעִיתִי נְאֻם ה'. לָכֵן כֹּה אָמַר ה' אֱלֹקי יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל הָרֹעִים הָרֹעִים אֶת עַמִּי אַתֶּם הֲפִצֹתֶם אֶת צֹאנִי וַתַּדִּחוּם וְלֹא פְקַדְתֶּם אֹתָם הִנְנִי פֹּקֵד עֲלֵיכֶם אֶת רֹעַ מַעַלְלֵיכֶם נְאֻם ה'. וַאֲנִי אֲקַבֵּץ אֶת שְׁאֵרִית צֹאנִי מִכֹּל הָאֲרָצוֹת אֲשֶׁר הִדַּחְתִּי אֹתָם שָׁם וַהֲשִׁבֹתִי אֶתְהֶן עַל נְוֵהֶן וּפָרוּ וְרָבוּ [...] הִנֵּה יָמִים בָּאִים נְאֻם ה' וַהֲקִמֹתִי לְדָוִד צֶמַח צַדִּיק וּמָלַךְ מֶלֶךְ וְהִשְׂכִּיל וְעָשָׂה מִשְׁפָּט וּצְדָקָה בָּאָרֶץ. בְּיָמָיו תִּוָּשַׁע יְהוּדָה וְיִשְׂרָאֵל יִשְׁכֹּן לָבֶטַח וְזֶה שְּׁמוֹ אֲשֶׁר יִקְרָאוֹ ה' צִדְקֵנוּ"

הקיבוץ, איחוד העם, כנגד הפצתו ופירודו מהווים בסיס ראשוני בדרך לגאולה ולעתיד טוב יותר.

בקולו המיוחד של השופר שנשמע השנה, ניזכר ונפקוד את אשר עברנו בשנה האחרונה. נעביר ונספור ונמנה, את אחינו שמסרו את נפשם למעננו. מתוך קול השופר נתפלל לפקודה טובה יותר בעבור השנה המתחדשת עלינו לטובה ולברכה.

Permission to Cry



Rabbi Dvir Cahana (YCT Semikha ’24)

Rabbi, Base Miami

Miami, Florida

Preface

My wife and I have both been pulled back to Israel 4 times this year. Once, even, guided by my Rebbes at YCT, Rav Avi Weiss and Rav Yonah Berman. Never in my life has the feeling of *Libi baMizrach* (my heart is in the East) felt more viscerally true. This year has weighed so heavily on us in the Diaspora and so heavily on our families in the Holy Land.

One recurring theme through my missions has been the determination of the people that I met. I have seen a nation resolved to not allow their emotions to get in the way of the task at hand. As Avital Sharon, a social worker, shared, “The therapy will come, the time to process and contemplate long term solutions will arrive, but right now there's work to be done.”

The High Holidays are upon us and it is hard to imagine that we are still here—still clinging on to our adrenaline reserves; still held in this moment. How do we look back at the year when we are still just hanging on day by the day?

Elul is the time of the year in our calendar where we are asked to reflect. I wrote this poem in response to the devastating discovery of the 6 murdered hostages who had been alive days breath in their lungs hours before being found, having survived over 10 horrific months in captivity. This is for Rachel Goldberg-Polin and for all those grieving in this year of bloodshed and tears.

הַרשָׁאָה לבכות: Permission to cry

When Joseph was in the womb did he feel Rachel’s yearning tears shape his being; her every whispered prayer carving dreams into his bones? Did Rachel know her dream child would galavant on the stage of the celestial moon—mingled in the Lord’s room but color coated to play the groundling to a captive audience, navigating his shimmering fate beneath the gaze of angels and the judgment of stars? As the babe’s eyes awoke

עכשיו יש לה הַרשָׁאָה לבכות

When Joseph was in the pit alone could he feel the prayers of his father woven into the wind? Did a shofar blow hope into that crater, or did it breach Jericho once more, the contours of Sisera’s mother wails, encircled until they dissolve into the hot air of waiting despair? How long could she last in her grovel as her battery depletes. Did Jacob’s speckled fear of freckled sheeps detain his bleating goats? When the shadows hid away, was there anyone but he, who could unshatter a morsel

of divine vim a victim to the corporeal whim? A stiff neck holds his tunnel vision. Disarmed from the source when put afar, a hostage to fate. Before the fingers point, could his breath catch sail with the hem and haw of unbequeathed light? As the lad was taken away

עכשיו יש לו הַרשָׁאָה לבכות

When Joseph wailed so deep that all of Egypt could hear, did his forever pitch pierce the stripped heavens and stir the silent Sun to weep? Could Jacob, sloshing between the flotsam and refuse of his hollowed grief, feel the tremors of that sound, a son's broken heart reaching across the chasm of lost time? Disheveled, they begged Joseph’s verdict to bend. Without a turning of tides or a flint rock poised to ignite, forget the swelling debates, the apologetics, the harsh hope and the misplaced spite. The fissures were etched in the frame of ammunition. Not on a morose morrow, but so long as the tragedy is extant

עכשיו יש להם הַרשָׁאָה לבכות

When Moses found his bones at last, did they take to the streets? We brought them home. Unbounded for once, shackled no more but just a dram too late. Not one whole heart could even bark. Tumbling between the tablet shards and the dust of the earth. Joseph was reunited at last with the unsown tears of Rachel’s bitter cry. Between the sobs of a raging river the current ceases to flow. On the day the city flooded, we never felt so alone. All halts when laid bare, Mother Earth on her hind legs. Deer Joseph, Holy Rachel. We watch as you embrace and expel a lifetime of unrealized solace. And as their forms emerge from the debris

עכשיו יש לנו הַרשָׁאָה לבכות

The Soul's Ascent

Rav Yonadav Tapuchi (YCT Rikmah '22)

Ra"m, Mechinat Ruach Sadeh

Ateret, Israel

The teachings of the Baal Shem Tov (1698-1760, hereafter: Besht), originator of the Hasidic movement, have mostly reached us through the writings of his students. However, we have one piece of personal correspondence from the Besht to his brother-in-law in which he narrates two separate occasions in which he spiritually ascended to the heavens. In the letter, the Besht states that on Rosh Hashana of 1746 his soul ascended to the heavenly realms eventually arriving at the hall of the Messiah. The Messiah revealed to him that the redemption will come only after two things come to pass: a. the Besht's teachings spread; b. other individuals will also be able to experience similar spiritual experiences to the Besht.

This letter elucidates the essential role of mystical unification and ascension in the Besht's teachings, an idea that appears throughout his students' recordings of his teachings. These core tenets appear throughout the Besht's teachings about prayer, the central practice of Hasidut. We will explore some of the Besht's statements about prayer to understand what makes the practice he espouses different from other notions of prayer.

Letting prayer flow

According to classical halakhic texts, one is required to concentrate on the meaning of the words of the prayers. Since the intent is to ask God for our needs, we must be clear on what our needs are. The Besht took a different approach. He maintained that, fundamentally, prayer is a spiritual and meditative experience when our souls cleave to the Divine. That means that while the words are important, they are only tools to achieve this spiritual state.

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Ephraim of Sudilkov, grandson of the Besht, wrote:

> I heard from my grandfather and teacher of blessed memory that the letters are without meaning, therefore you should ask from the letters themselves…from the hidden Divinity within them, that He will help us to say the words with true and pure intent. (*Degel Mahaneh Efrayim, Ekev, Bi'shalah*)

The structure of the liturgy and its carefully chosen words are beautiful and meaningful. However, the endless halakhic details may be a significant obstacle to passionate, spontaneous worship. To achieve that kind of prayer, one needs to free oneself from the restraints of standard halakhic prayer.

The first step is to let go of the necessity of finding specific meaning in the words of the prayers. Focusing on the words of the prayers can create a barrier to experiencing the Divine. Instead the Besht suggests that we experience the words of prayer as rungs on a ladder reaching upward. "You must also listen to each word that you utter, for the Shechinah is speaking, and you are but its handmaid" (*Tzava'at Ha'Rivash 8b)*.

Intention without intent

One who utilizes in their prayer all the mystical intentions known to them is only using what they know. On the other hand, when one simply says the word, being unified and submerged totally within it, all intentions are included inevitably and automatically. For every letter is a full world. (*Tzava'a haRivash 14)*

Every utterance is an open invitation to this most holy union. In closing our eyes and disconnecting for a moment from our surroundings and ourselves, we reconnect to our souls and we can perceive that the time spent in prayer is the chance to unify with God. Using a siddur is valuable when one is unable to achieve this. But if one is able to achieve such a spiritual state, it is better to shut one's eyes so that nothing, even the words of siddur, do not distract them from being attached to the Divine.

Words are like small-talk. They give us the time to begin to reconnect before entering the real conversation. We need to come with no agenda, no list of requests. We are encouraged to completely dissociate during prayer, to enter a meditative state where our soul departs from the physical world.

In a significant departure from the halakhic notion of prayer, praying automatically where one goes through the motions with no particular intention – a kind of stream of consciousness prayer, is the goal.

Sometimes one can go through the prayers swiftly, for their heart is intensely burning with love of the blessed Divine. Then the words are uttered automatically and exit the mouth by themselves. (*Tzava'at Ha'Rivash 4b*)

When one is not paying attention to the words, inevitably, one makes mistakes and omits words. The Besht considered that an acceptable price. He analogizes this to a parent listening to the babbling of their child. In the same way that this incomprehensible speech is precious, if our prayers are suffused with love for the Divine, our mistakes and the omissions are discounted. The relationship we develop with God has priority over the halakhic regulations.

Strolling between worlds

Even if at first one is not able to fully immerse in prayer, the words should be said with great intention, slowly applying oneself till Hashem will aid them to daven with full intention and immersion. (*Tzava'at Ha'Rivash 4a)*

How can we ever imagine applying the language of heavenly realms to our mundane life experiences?
We are called to view ourselves and our mundane existence as one of great significance and sanctity. The Divine worlds are not far off, but within reach – our very physical, emotional and rational worlds are the same fabled heavenly realms. The meditative practice of regular prayer can be

the gateway to exploring what may initially seem as lofty spiritual realms.

Unifying with the Divine, the ascension of the soul into heaven is a delicate affair. To achieve this state of unification and to sustain it while davening, requires special attention. We set the scene – we enter cautiously, closing our eyes and uttering the words of the prayer letter by letter, staying open to the stream of consciousness. Our soul then reaches out and feels the Divine embrace.

Like a person roaming between rooms, like so they will wander in thought in the divine realms. (*Keter Shem Tov v. 2; 17b, 20d)*

Mesirut Nefesh

Does that mean the Besht advocated a motionless, trance-like davening? Not at all. Many Hasidic minyanim, contemporary and of old, employ erratic gestures as part of their prayer. As the Besht said, "When a person is drowning in the river and makes all sorts of movements to rescue himself of the raging waters washing him away, of course people seeing him won't make fun of him and his motions. Thus, when davening and making gestures, one shouldn't be made fun of for they are saving themselves from the surging evil-waters" (*Likutim Yekarim 15a)*.

Did the Besht advocate soulful singing; what we often think of as the essence of chasidic prayer? Not that either.

There are people who sing the words when engaged in this work of prayer. They specifically intend to say these words in this tune and those in another, and believe this is holy work, and this is how they'll achieve passionate prayer that'll please Hashem. But all this is foolishness, their work is false and in vain, and they walk in darkness, and have not yet entered the path of truth.
The path of truth is that while praying one needs to strip oneself of the materiality of this world until they feel as if they are no longer in this world. Then, simply say the letters aloud and attach their thought to the Divine letters to hear the meaning of the holy words. Then, suddenly, by itself a flame will ignite within them, they'll be engulfed in the burning fire of immense Divine love and awe.
This is the true way of serving Hashem, the way where the light dwells.

This I heard and received from the Besht.

(*Geulat Yisrael, Pitgamin Kadishin 17a s.v. Megillah nikreit*)

The mode of prayer the Besht introduced can be realized in many different forms, some silent and unnoticeable, others loud and ecstatic. They all share one commonality, stepping into prayer fully committed to and with an open heart and letting the moment lead.Wherever the moment takes us, to stay with one letter or to recite the entire davening in a rush; to jump and clap or to stand in place without moving; to sing or cry aloud or to say the words in a monotone – everything goes, as long as it enables our souls to ascend and cleave to Hashem.

Some final thoughts

How relevant are the teachings of the old chasidic master from the Carpathian mountains to contemporary Jewish communities?

Imagine the following: Insteading of splitting up into different minyanim, we join in one

collective davening in which each of us prays in the unique way that brings us closer to the Divine: a tailored individual davening while praying along with the community. Such an option offers something for everyone. The community uses the traditional prayer but there is room for not following the liturgical text exactly for those who feel trapped by the repetitiveness. This type of prayer can address both those who are new to traditional prayer as well as to those for whom the liturgy is familiar; for those of mystical and rational bents. The focus is on opening oneself to the Divine presence, letting the experience unfold organically in the way that works for each person.

Even if one doesn't personally resonate with mystical teachings, the act of being present and open in prayer can lead to new interpretations and insights. Wherever your soul naturally roams —whether it's inner work or working on challenging contemporary issues, there is room for different intentions. There is no right or wrong way to pray.

I understand that this is a big ask of our diverse communities but, I believe there is a pull to davening together while allowing for a wide range of individual expressions, especially in times of great need.

Ultimately, the Besht's teachings offer a path for each one of us to deepen our spiritual connection, achieve personal transformation, and find meaning and relevance in our davening.

Taking Pills to Ease the Fast

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In recent years, it has become popular for products to be marketed that will make the fast on Yom Kippur easier. On a certain level, this makes sense. Fasting for twenty-five hours while also spending most of the day standing on one’s feet as one prays in synagogue can make the day uncomfortable at best and unbearable at worst. It makes sense that we might take steps to make the day a little easier, if only so that we can be more present and less distracted during the davening.

Already in the early twentieth century, pills to aid in fasting were being sold, and Rabbi Mordechai Yaakov Breisch asked whether it was permitted to use them. Rabbi Breisch, author of the Chelkat Yaakov, was a noted posek who lived in Poland and Germany and later escaped to Switzerland before the Holocaust. In a teshuvah (Chelkat Yaakov, Orech Chaim 216), he explores whether taking the pills on the day before Yom Kippur is permitted. One might think, he explains, that there is a problem because the Torah emphasizes that Yom Kippur is meant to be a day of affliction. If so, making the fast easier, might, at the very least, violate the spirit of the Torah if not the letter of the law. However, Rabbi Breisch points to the fact that the Torah also commands us to eat on the day before Yom Kippur and that this too is a mitzvah. We make sure to eat before Yom Kippur to ensure that we will be able to fast properly on the day that is to follow.

Rabbi Breisch argues that taking such a pill before Yom Kippur should be seen as no different than one who eats extra food before sundown so that they will feel fully satiated as they enter the holiday. The Talmud itself already notes that one feels full as long as the food one has eaten is still being digested, and that as a result of this, God has compassion on dogs who might have difficulty finding food by allowing the food they eat to stay in their belly for three days. Taking a pill on the day before Yom Kippur to ease the fast functions similarly. Though one swallows it on the day before Yom Kippur, it slowly releases its medication in one’s belly over the course of the day so it can enter into the bloodstream and reduce hunger. One should look at it as no different than a piece of food that takes a long time to digest and staves off hunger.

It is important to note that in Chazon Ovadiah (Yamim Noraim, p. 256), Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef supports the position of the

ושוהה הרעב לבא. ואי משום שעושה בכוונה בני"ד בכדי שלא יסבול הרעב וביו"כ עינוי כתיב כמו שהעיר כת"ה – מה בכך אדרבה לשון רש"י ביומא פ"א ב' וז" ל כלומר התקן עצמך בתשעה כדי שתוכל להתענות בעשרה, ובר"ה ט' א' ז"ל כל דמפיש באכילה ושתי' טפי עדיף – וכאמור דכל הענין רק בהנאת מעיו, ברור דמותר כיון דנעשה הכל מעיו"כ.

אכן לדעתי אין להתיר זה לאדם בריא מטעם אחר, מי יערב לו שהכדורים נעשים בתכלית הכשרות בלי איזה חשש תערובות איסור – כשהדבר נוגע לחולה, אין מדקדקין כל כך משום חשש סכנה או רק הסתעפות סכנה, עי' תשובת רע"א סימן ס' – אבל באדם בריא רק שלא יסבול הרעב, צריך לידע בברור שאין שום חשש תערובות איסור, כן נלפענ"ד.

We come to our question about whether one can swallow a pill like this on the day before Yom Kippur in order to quiet one's hunger on Yom Kippur, by releasing small parts of the pill that work against the hunger.

In my opinion, it is obvious that it is permitted even if we need to analyze the enjoyment the stomach derives from this on Yom Kippur. First and foremost, the act of eating [taking the pill] is done on the day before Yom Kippur and not on Yom Kippur itself. If so, then in my humble opinion this is exactly the same as one who eats and is satiated on the day before Yom Kippur and when it gets close to sunset, wants to eat additional food with the intention that they should eat plenty, and that the time of digestion will last longer, for as long as the food is not fully digested, one is not hungry. See Berachot 53, where it says that the length of digestion is the time that one is not hungry… this applies whether one eats a lot or a little. Even if this distinction is according to Resh Lakish, it can be assumed that Rabbi Yochanan does not disagree that eating

Chelkat Yaakov but also cites Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach who states that one should not use suppositories on Yom Kippur itself to ease the fast. While they may not be considered a prohibited form of eating, using them on Yom Kippur would violate the spirit of the day and, in the famous words of the Ramban, cause one to be a scoundrel with the permission of the Torah.

שו"ת חלקת יעקב <u>אורח חיים סימן רטז</u>

ותבנא לשאלתנו הנ"ל, לבלוע כדור כזה בעיו"כ בכדי להשקיט רעבונו ביום כיפור, מפאת שבכל פעם נימוק גרעין אחד שבתוך הכדור וזה מועיל נגד הרעב .

אינו רעב, עי' ברכות נ"ג כמה שיעור עיכול כל זמן שאינו רעב… כאן באכילה מרובה כאן באכילה מועטת, ואף דחילוק זה רק לר"ל אבל מסתמא גם ר"י לא יחלוק ע"ז דאכילה מרובה זמן העיכול יותר, ועי' שבת קנ"ה ב' יודע הקב"ה בכלב שמזונותיו מועטין לפיכך שוהה אכילתו במעיו שלשה ימים, חזינן דהרעב בא יחד עם עיכול מאכל שבמעיו – הכי יעלה על הדעת שאסור לעשות כן. וני"ד נמי כן הוא, לפי שהסביר לי רופא דתי השערתו, באלו הכדורים שבולעים בכדי להשקיט הרעבון מסתמא כן הוא, דהכדור כרוך במעטפה או קליפה של איזה חומר, ובתוכו הגרעינין, ובביאת הכדור להקבה תימס הקליפה מכח העיכול שבקבה, והסיבה שהגרעינין שבכדור אינם נמסים יחד, או שכל גרעין מעוטף בקליפה מיוחדת באופן שגרעין אחד ימס בזמן מאוחר זה אחר זה, יען כי הקליפות שונות בחוזקן נגד כח העיכול, או אפשר שהחומר בעצמו שבכל גרעין שונה בחזקו נגד כח העיכול, וכשיתחיל להתעכל בא יבא כח הזנה שבו להדם ומשקיט הרעב, כמו בשארי אוכלין שההזנה בא יבא יחד עם העיכול ולאחר שיתעכל נפסק ההזנה ובא הרעב – וכן במאכלים יש שהם קלין להתעכל ויבא הרעב לאחר זמן מועט, ויש שהן קשין להתעכל ושוהה הרעב לבא עד זמן מרובה הכי אסור לאכול בערב יו"כ מאכלים הקשין להתעכל, רק משום חשש קרי מבואר בשו"ע לאכול בעיו"כ מאכלין קלין להתעכל ולא משום ששוהין להתעכל

plenty will cause the time of digestion to last longer. See Shabbat 155b in which it states that God knows that a dog's food is scarce, therefore its food stays in its belly for three days. One sees that the hunger comes together with the digestion of food in one's belly. How could it occur to one that that it would be prohibited to do this? The same is true in our case [of swallowing a pill to ease the fast] as was explained to me by a religious doctor. In his evaluation, these pills that one swallows to quiet hunger are in general wrapped in a covering or capsule of some material and inside of it are small little balls. When the pill arrives to the stomach, the outer covering dissolves from the digestive fluids in the stomach. The reason that the small little balls of medicine do not dissolve with it is because each little ball is covered in its own special material such that each dissolves one after the other or because the different coverings have different resistances to the digestive fluids, or because the little balls of medicine themselves have different resistances to the digestive fluid. When they begin to digest, their satiating power enters the blood and quiets the hunger similar to other foods in which their satiating power coincides with [the time of] digestion. When digestion stops, the hunger comes. So too with foods that are easy to digest, hunger comes quickly after. Foods that are harder to digest and stay [in the stomach] cause hunger to be delayed for a long time. Such foods are prohibited on the day before Yom Kippur only because they may cause a seminal emission as it explains in Shulchan Aruch that one should eat foods that are easy to digest and not because such foods [which are hard to digest] cause the hunger to be delayed. If one wanted to argue [it was prohibited to take the pills] because one does so intentionally not to suffer from hunger and regarding Yom Kippur, it is written "affliction," as the questioner raises, what of this? On the contrary, the language of Rashi in Yoma (81b) is that you should "prepare yourself on the ninth [of Tishrei], so that one will be able to fast on the tenth." In Rosh Hashanah (9a), Rashi says, "all those who increase their eating and drinking [on the ninth of Tishrei], it is considered better." Regarding the matter [that taking pills might be prohibited because they are like] deriving enjoyment from eating, it is clear that it is permitted because everything was done on the day before Yom Kippur.

Anorexia and Yom Kippur

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One of the first questions I investigated thoroughly 7 years ago when I began to discuss questions of Halacha and mental health, was that of fasting on Yom Kippur for those dealing with mental health disorders. Obviously, this is a question of great significance. Not only is it a Torah prohibition to eat or drink on the day even in small amounts, it is well known that a violation of this prohibition carries with it the punishment of *karet* which is reserved for severe transgressions. Additionally, beyond the severity of the prohibition, there is another important element at play here: Yom Kippur is the holiest day of the year. One’s entire future for the upcoming year is determined on this day. This enhances the urgency that people feel to observe the fast fully.

To further understand the plight that those with mental disorders find themselves in, mental disorders are often accompanied by significant feelings of shame and guilt – self-stigma. Those are dealing with these disorders may experience doubt as to the severity of what they’re experiencing, or think that it is their fault that they are incapable of functioning like other people. “I lack willpower,” they often tell themselves. “If I can’t fast, it’s my own doing, I can get better if I really want to.” This is almost always a false narrative, but when seen against the backdrop of missing out on the Yom Kippur fast, it is easy to fall prey to it.

For this reason, it is essential to be as clear as possible when paskening for those with mental disorders about the Yom Kippur fast, as clarity can help alleviate the internal doubts that accompany their decision. In this article, I will be discussing, specifically, anorexia nervosa. What follows is the result of discussions with both rabbis and mental health professionals.

To determine whether a man or woman suffering from anorexia nervosa must fast on Yom Kippur, we must distinguish between several situations. The first case is a life-threatening situation resulting from self-starvation and extreme weight loss. Obviously, someone in this state does not fast on Yom Kippur but rather will eat according to what the medical professional dictates.

A second case is one where the immediate physical danger has passed. It is now necessary to treat the pervasive mental condition, and bring the person dealing with

the disorder into a state of balance (this includes not only eating in a balanced fashion, but also making sure their mental state is balanced. This means that they are not having damaging thoughts, they do not suffer from suicidal ideation, they are not plagued and struggling with this disorder daily, etc).

Sometimes people suffering from this stage of the disorder are still hospitalized or in inpatient mental health facilities. At times, they are back home but must attend outpatient meetings. Whether they are still in-patient or out-patient, individuals in this stage must not fast at all because they have not yet reached a balanced state. They are still in the active stage of this disorder and must eat in accordance with the dictates of medical professionals.

The third situation is more complicated. Individuals in this category are not in any immediate danger to their lives; they are able to maintain an out-of-hospital routine without close care and supervision (it is important to note that individuals in this stage may still need to check in with therapists). While these individuals are fairly balanced, the ruling here is determined on a case-by-case basis.

What follows are some basic guidelines:

(a) Anyone whose anorexia was caught early on, before any significant development occurred, should consult with their therapist and convey that information to their rabbi for consideration.

(b) Those who have undergone a rehabilitation and treatment process have now recovered, (meaning, their lives are in proper balance), their therapists determine that they can fast and they feel that fasting will not result in regression should fast.

In the past, some have taken issue with this ruling, feeling that any person with a history of anorexia should be told they don't have to fast for life to safeguard their health. I understand this concern and share it. However, not only have I heard from several mental health professionals that this is inaccurate, I believe that such a ruling sends a depressing and debilitating message to the individual: "You are sick for life, you will never be able to fast on Yom Kippur, never be able to join with the community in observing the holiest of days."

Obviously, I would not hesitate to make such a statement when an individual's life hangs in the balance. However, since according to many professionals this is not so in this case, I think we need to give a message of hope to all those suffering from this disorder: you CAN get better, you CAN rejoin the community in this holy practice at some later stage. Don't feel dejected, and don't give up. I am happy to say that my experience has also shown this to be true: I have seen many such individuals get better and reach a point where they can rejoin the community of fasters and do so successfully without harm.

(c) Those who have undergone a treatment process and have now recovered, but their lives are somewhat out of balance, or their therapists have told them not to fast because they think the disorder would be triggered for one reason or another, or they themselves feel this will happen (even if the professionals do not think so) should not fast on Yom Kippur, due to the significant risk involved.

Final points:

(1) Shiurim (drinking or eating in small amounts) is not an option with anorexia. Either the person eats, or they do not. If they must eat, restricting their intake could be as disastrous as having them fast.

(2) Anorexia is possibly the deadliest disorder in the DSM. The lower estimate of mortality from this condition stands at 10 percent (!), and the higher estimate stands at 30 percent (!!!). Anorexia should be treated halakhically with the utmost seriousness.

(3) Anorexia has attributes that are very similar to addiction, which compounds the issue and demands extra caution.

One last note: I know how hard it is for people not to fast on Yom Kippur, it is the one leniency that those, like those who are sick or elderly, beg me not to give them. They feel it is a violation of the day and feel shame or extreme reluctance to follow this ruling. I certainly don't want people's mental health to worsen because they follow a lenient ruling such as this, so let me be clear: if according to the above-mentioned guidelines you should eat on this holiest of days, it becomes a MITZVAH for you to eat. There is no greater way for you to serve God on this day than to eat and drink, get better, and reach a state of balance in your physical and mental health so that you may be eventually able to keep many Yom Kippurs in years to come.

May we all have a good, safe and healthy year.

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