

ומלתם את ערלת לבבכם (דברים י:טז)

# *Uncovering* the **HEART**

ומל ה' אלקיך את לבבך ואת לבב זרעך (דברים ל:ז)

## **Yamim Noraim 5780**

RABBI MOSHE HAUER

Bnai Jacob Shaarei Zion  
Congregation  
Baltimore, Maryland



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Baltimore, Maryland

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## Dedication

This collection of essays is dedicated  
to the memory of my father and teacher,

**HaRav Benyamin Hauer ז"ל**

**אאמו"ר הרב בנימין ב"ר משה ז"ל**

who taught our family and countless others  
how to live and breathe the words of the Torah.

I hope and pray that הקב"ה will continue  
to grant strength and health to our dear mother,

**Mrs. Miriam Hauer**

to continue עמו"ש to guide and inspire all of us  
along our path in life, בדרך עץ החיים,



## **Dedication**

This booklet is dedicated  
by

**Lou & Edith Goldberg**

in memory of Edie's parents

**Albert & Paula Schwartz**

**ישראל דוב בן שמואל ז"ל**

**פערל בת צבי הירש ז"ל**





## Dedication

This booklet is dedicated  
in appreciation of

**The Leadership, Membership  
and Friends of BJSZ -**

our extended family.

We continue to cherish our relationships  
with each of you and are forever grateful to you  
for your enduring kindness, love, and support.

May יהי קרב"ה grant each and every one of you  
every *bracha* for the coming year.

With much appreciation and love,

Moshe and Mindi Hauer



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# Preface

*Elul* is both the beginning of the year and the end of the year. It is a month in which we look forward to Rosh Hashanah, to re-engaging with Hashem in the month of the Tishrei and to the spiritual aspirations we develop for the year to come. But it is also a time to look back, to take stock of the goals we set for ourselves over the past year and to see how successful we have been, or, perhaps, how we can still find room to grow.

For the past many years, Rabbi Hauer's *Elul* and Tishrei theme, which set the tone for our shul's growth during this season, have been among the highlights of the year. This booklet - a collection of Rabbi Hauer's *Drashos* from last year's *Yamim Noraim* - is precisely what we need to help make our *Elul* meaningful. It is a chance to reflect on the aspirations we set for ourselves and for our shul. Instead of a *sefer* written for the general public, this is a *sefer* written for us, specifically attuned to our needs and our potential.

We are very grateful that Rabbi Hauer has compiled his *Drashos* again this year. I hope that his words inspire us to reflection, to growth and to treasure this special time of year.

With best wishes for a year full of Torah, good health and growth,

*Rabbi Daniel Rose*



# Foreword

The period of the month of *Elul* and the *Yamim Noraim*, known as the High Holiday season, is a great gift, *בן הטובות אשר הטיב ה'ית עם ברואי*. Each year we are afforded this opportunity to reflect and to reconnect, to spend weeks engaged with G-d and community on a fundamentally deeper level than the usual. Ideally this serves as a basis for the substantive and tangible adjustments to our lives resultant of *Teshuva*. But even without those measurable changes, we treasure this time as our annual visit back to the source, to the wellspring of our existence, and we draw upon its inspiration – consciously and unconsciously – for the balance of the year.

This booklet records the central addresses of the *Yamim Noraim* 5780 season at BJSZ, dedicated to the theme, “Uncovering the Heart.” It is my hope that you will find them of some value, and that each of us and all of us will continue to grow in every way – religiously, inter-personally and individually – to enhance ourselves, our families and our community, and to sanctify Hashem’s Name in our world.

This past year brought many dramatic and unanticipated changes for all of us. When the Drashos in this booklet were composed and delivered; when we raised our voices in prayer and opened our hearts to reflection and change; we had no clue what lay in store for us. Alas, that is the nature of life. We hang by a thread.

While our role within BJSZ has significantly shifted, Mindi and I are very grateful to continue to be an active part of our shul family. It is particularly meaningful for us to see BJSZ continuing its invaluable role in the lives of its members and of the Baltimore community, under the very capable leadership of Rabbi Daniel and Yocheved Rose. We all admire how Rabbi Rose has led us through these harrowing days of the pandemic, and we look forward to his strong and steady leadership during the upcoming *Yamim Noraim* season and onward, into what we hope and pray will be calmer and happier times, *בעו"ה*.

Please accept our best wishes for a healthy and productive year, a *בתיבה וחתימה טובה*.

*Rabbi Moshe Hauer*



# Holding On For Dear Life

## *First Night of Rosh Hashana*

*Elul* began for us with an image. An image of life hanging by a thread.

On Wednesday evening before *Rosh Chodesh Elul*, just as I was preparing to drive our son to his flight to Israel to begin the *Elul Zman*, I received an email from Yitzie Pretter. He told me about a hang-gliding accident they had just experienced in Israel that involved his daughter Leah. Leah was fine, but the guide who accompanied her had died.

Later it became clear that Leah had been hanging from a cliffside suspended by the parachute rope while Yitzie and others were on top of the cliff holding on to the parachute to keep the rope in place until help arrived.

That is a Rosh Hashana image. Life hanging by a thread.

The Talmud (BT *Rosh Hashana* 16b) teaches about the three books that are opened on Rosh Hashana: The righteous are immediately inscribed in the book of life, while the wicked are similarly inscribed for death. The *Beinonim*, those who hover between righteousness and wickedness, תלויים הכפורים ועומדים עד יום הכפורים, are left hanging until Yom Kippur, when their fate is decided one way or the other.

Left hanging between life and death. Precisely this image. The ultimate picture of fearful vulnerability. The image of these Days of Judgment, when we hold on for dear life, realizing that our fate is “up in the air”, that we need a positive decision from G-d to emerge unscathed, to be granted a new lease on life.

This is the *אימת הדין*, the fear of judgment, that seems to set the tone of these days.

But there is a second image. It is also an image of a father holding onto a child. But it is a very different image.

This image was drawn by Rav Avraham Elya Kaplan, one of the great students of the Slabodka Yeshiva. He draws this image in the title essay of the beautiful collection of his writings, *Be’Ikvos haYirah*, where he describes the simplistic caricature of the G-d fearing person – “a bent head, furrowed brow, faraway eyes, hunched back, a shaky left hand and a right hand pounding his chest in confession...”

But – argued Rav Avraham Elya - this understanding defies the words of

*Yeshayahu* (58:5) that we read on Yom Kippur, where G-d says that what He seeks is not the bowed head. And any understanding that associates fear of G-d with anguish defies the Talmud's statement (BT *Sanhedrin* 46a) that our anguish pains G-d. How could G-d give us a constant Mitzvah – fear of Heaven – that will cause both us and Him anguish?

Said Rav Avraham Elya:

היראה לא צער היא, לא כאב, לא דאגת תמרורים. ומשל למה היא דומה? לרטט יראתו של אב על בנו הקטן האהוב לו, בשעה שהוא מורכב על כתיפו והוא רוקד עמו ושוחק לפניו, להיות נזהר בו שלא יפול. יש כאן שמחה שאין דומה לה, עונג שאין דומה לו, והיראה הנעימה כרוכה על עקבם. אינה מעכבת בחרות הריקוד, אינה מטיפה בה טיפה של מרה. אדרבה, היא מעודדת אותם, עוברת היא בתוכם, כחוט שדרה זה הזוקף ומאלם. ומסבבת היא אותם כמסגרת צנועה זו המשוה חן ונועם. היא תוסיף קיום, היא תחזיק מעמד. יראת ד' יוסיף ימים.

*“Fear (of G-d) presents neither anguish nor pain, nor a bitter worry. To what can it be compared? To the fears of a father regarding his beloved child who is riding on his shoulders as he dances with him, being cautious that he should not fall. Here we have incomparable joy, incomparable pleasure, with a pleasant fear in the background. That fear does not stand in the way of the uninhibited dance of joy and does not infuse it with even a drop of bitterness. Quite the opposite. The cautious fear reinforces the joy and lies at its core....”*

This is a different image. It too is an image of a parent holding on to a child. But not a petrified parent; rather a dancing parent. The fear and caution that he exercises is an expression of the value he places on the child. He is fearful, he is cautious. But he is joyous.

To fear G-d means to value that which He holds dear. To rejoice in the fear of G-d, וגילו ברעה, is to realize that our connection to Hashem as Klal Yisrael is something profoundly precious. We hold on to it and to G-d's word with strength; we are attentive to ensure its safety. We dance with our love and value of Hashem and His service.

This is a very different image of our relationship to G-d on these days.

Which one is it? Is fear of G-d the image of our dangling from the rope, hanging on for dear life, suspended between life and death? Or is it the excited dance with G-d, filled with joy and seasoned with a dose of caution?

The truth however is that the images are not really in conflict. We assume them to be, because when we think of ourselves dangling between

life and death, we see that rope being held by a G-d who is exercising ultimate control over us. But the truer image is the exact image of our story.

Yes, we may be hanging from a thread, between life and death. But Hashem is the One at the top of the cliff, holding on to that rope for our dear life, making sure that we do not fall, that we can stay safely in place until we can be pulled up to safety, to life. And when He will pull us up – to borrow the image of Rav Avraham Elya – He will then move us to His shoulders and dance with us, holding on firmly and with joy.

Every one of us is hanging on by a thread on Rosh Hashana. And when G-d grants us that new lease on life - just as on that cliffside - what must emerge is immense gratitude at that gift. Immense gratitude. Life does not just go on. It is a gift that needs to be renewed. And whenever it is renewed we must experience it as a gift, as a vote of confidence from G-d. He wants us to live. He deems our continued life valuable, worthy.

ברוך אתה ד' מחיה המתים (See *Maharsha* to *Brachos* 58b).

To fear G-d means to recognize our vulnerability, that we are in His hands. But we can rejoice in that fear. We can rejoice as we dance over the privilege of being in Hashem's caring, loving hands.

This is a day with many intense feelings: fearful vulnerability, gratitude, and joy. These feelings burst forth from the heart, blowing off any covering of the heart. Let each of us experience the genuine emotions of Rosh Hashana: the feeling of hanging by a thread, held on for dear life by our loving Father; and the feeling of dancing on his shoulders.

# Uncovering the Heart ומלתם את ערלת לבבכם

## *First Day of Rosh Hashana*

Should we be crying on Rosh Hashana?

In the Book of Nechemia (ch. 8), it records the story of a Rosh Hashana observed at the beginning of the time of the Second Temple.

ויאמר נחמיה הוא התרשתא ועזרא הספר והלויים המבינים את העם לכל העם היום קדש הוא לד' אלקיכם אל תתאבלו ואל תבכו כי בוכים כל העם כשמעם את דברי התורה: ויאמר להם לכו אכלו משמנים ושתו ממתקים ושלחו מנות לאיזן נכון לו כי קדוש היום לאדנינו ואל תעצבו כי חדות ד' היא מעוזכם: והלויים מחשים לכל העם לאמר הסו כי היום קדש ואל תעצבו:

*The people were crying, and Ezra and Nechemia told them – “Do not mourn, do not cry ... go home and eat delicacies... do not be sad, for the joy of G-d is your strength.”*

Based on this verse, the Gaon of Vilna instructed his disciples not to cry on Rosh Hashana (see *Maaseh Rav* no. 207). On the other hand, the great *Arizal*, as quoted by his student Rav Chaim Vital (*Shaar Hakavanos* II, p 208), viewed it as vital for a person to shed tears on Rosh Hashana.

So should we cry or shouldn't we?

They can both be right (עיין שו"ת יביע אומר ח"א סימן לט ועוד). Because there are two kinds of tears. Yes, as Ezra said, we must not cry and mourn. We must not cry tears of sadness. But we may - we must - shed tears of feeling.

The Talmud (BT *Eruvin* 3b) uses the term **עצב**, the Hebrew term for sadness used by Ezra, to imply something shrunken and tight, wound up (אמות עצבות). This is used in contrast to the term **שוחק**, the Hebrew term for laughter, which implies something broad and loose (עיי"ש אמות שוחקות).

There are tears that the Shulchan Aruch allows us to shed even on a regular Shabbos because they may actually provide the person weeping with *oneg*, with pleasure. Those may be the tears of charged excitement, or they may simply be tears that express the release of painful feelings (see *Mishneh Berura* 248:4). In either case, they are tears that energize and

liberate us, rather than the opposite.

We certainly should do our best not to cry those kinds of sad tears that cause us to shrink, to tighten up. But there are tears of pure emotion, of amazement, of wonder and awe, tears – sometimes of joy but other times of simply raw feeling - that are expansive. These are precisely the tears of Rosh Hashana.

Tears that you feel better crying.

Do you ever wonder why people cry at happy times? Why mourners often find themselves laughing?

Psychologists wonder about it, neuroscientists theorize about it. There are lots of fuzzy theories and ideas, and it would seem that – at the risk of over-simplifying things – it could be best summed up in the following way: We spend much of our life keeping our emotions in check, keeping them locked up. But when we have a truly emotional experience, when we allow ourselves to uncork that reservoir of locked up feelings, they all come tumbling out together. All the happiness and all the pain, all the joy and all the sadness that were held in check, hidden from view – and perhaps even from thought – pour out in one big rush.

Our hearts are covered, closed. We have a hard time with feeling things, and we have an even harder time with expressing feelings.

Some people view being “emotional” as a vice. But most of us find our coldness frustrating. We wish we could feel more. We wish we could connect more emotionally to others, to be more sensitive to their pain, to share their joy. We wish we could be less mechanical in our relationships, in our prayers, in our *Mitzvos*. We enjoy a good cry, and we certainly love a good laugh.

And feeling is good. It is the way the Torah (*Devarim* 30:6) defines *Teshuva*; ומלך ד' אלוקיך את לבבך – “Hashem will uncover your heart.”

Three months ago, my wife and I paid a post-*Shiva* call to Mrs. Leah Trenk. My wife Mindi has a close friendship with Mrs. Trenk, whom she views as a mentor, and we had been in Israel when she had lost and sat *Shiva* for her husband, Rabbi Dovid Trenk. We decided to pay her a post-*Shiva* call.

I honestly and without exaggeration think that the hour we spent with Mrs. Trenk may have been one of the most inspiring and instructive hours of my life.

Let me tell you a bit about Rabbi Dovid Trenk.

Rabbi Trenk was a *Rebbe*, a teacher of young men. Already in his early twenties, he was given a class of students in Brooklyn's Mir Yeshiva High School who were not all that academic and were a bit on the rambunctious side. A short time later, he moved to the yeshiva in Adelphia, where he spent decades educating generations of young men who for any number of reasons did not quite fit in to regular frameworks. While we are now quite accustomed to discussing this kind of student and a growing number of alternative educational frameworks, "Adelphia" – as it was known – was for decades the only place of its kind.

And Rabbi Trenk was absolutely one of a kind.

Make no mistake about it. His unique touch was not reserved for or appreciated solely by the child who did not fit in. Rabbi Trenk's summers were spent in Camp Munk, a very established and establishment institution. There as well he uplifted and affected thousands of young men who fit in just perfectly, who set the standard that everyone else often struggled to match.

But Rabbi Trenk gave them all something priceless.

Linda Storch told me that separate and apart from his students, to his family – and he was Linda's mother's 1st cousin – he was the person to talk to for absolute empathy and caring. He sat with you, he looked right into your eyes, and he cried with you.

What was the gift he gave everyone around him? There was more than one precious gift he gave. But today we will focus on one of those priceless gifts.

He gave people their heart. He uncorked it for them. He let his feelings out, he let them go, and in that way, he allowed others to do the same. He was utterly unafraid of feelings and of expressing them. If anything, he was terrified of keeping them bottled up.

One of the first times I encountered Rabbi Trenk, I saw something that people who knew him better than I saw hundreds of times. We were at a Simcha, and Rabbi Trenk – who knew one of the host *Baalei Simcha* and was in the area – stopped in. It so happened that during his short time there, one of the other *Baalei Simcha* was giving a speech. This person was a complete stranger to Rabbi Trenk, and from a different world. Rabbi Trenk was very tall and gangly, very neat yet modest in his dress and appearance, a lifelong teacher with a long beard and a visibly comfortable manner. The speaker was an extremely successful businessman, both



immaculately and very elegantly dressed, and meticulously formal and careful in his manner. When he finished his remarks – which were substantive and meaningful – Rabbi Trenk – all six feet and two inches of him – ran up to him from the back of the room and planted a big kiss on his cheek, thanking him for his “beautiful!” words.

The speaker did not know what hit him.

But when he realized, he softened. He – and everyone else in the room – appreciated how the wall of formality had been breached by an expression of friendship and love.

He did this all the time.

Yes, he was a “character”. You need to be a character to do things like that. You need to be totally unafraid to express yourself. Some people do that because they are wild and crazy. But Rabbi Trenk was a man on a mission. He wanted people to feel, to emote, and ultimately to express what was really on their hearts.

He lived in a world of wonder, a world where feelings *should* burst forth, and he did his part to help them to. And those fortunate enough to be around him welcomed that so much.

Rabbi Trenk’s younger brother Zevy is an educator and a personality in his own right, the High School principal of Yeshiva Darchei Torah in Far Rockaway, New York. A few years ago, he was the guest of honor at the yeshiva’s dinner and after the presentation was made to him, before he responded, a loud voice was heard from the crowd. “Zevy! Zevy!!” It was his older brother Rabbi Dovid Trenk. He was not on the program. But now he was.

Rabbi Trenk stood up on a chair and spoke at top of his lungs, saying how when he came to the hall people mistook him for his brother, the guest of honor, and were thanking him profusely for all that he did for their sons. With a voice breaking with emotion, he drew an image of their parents in Heaven, basking in the *Nachas* of knowing that when Rabbi Bender of Darchei Torah knew that he needed someone who would set a tone and an atmosphere of *בבוד התורה ושמחת התורה*, of reverence for Torah and of its absolute joy, it was their son Zevy who was chosen to do that. “And with that I introduce the guest of honor!”

Only a real character would do that, and things like that, hundreds of times. Some people like to make a scene, to garner attention. But that was not him at all. There were two aspects to the typical Rabbi Trenk

ouBTurst. First, it was utterly and completely genuine. He said what he felt in his throbbing heart. And second, he did it to break up the room, to crack the formality of the banquet, to help people stop and say – “Wow! This is not just another rubber chicken event. This is a celebration of the honor and the joy of Torah.”

He did it all the time. And everyone appreciated it. Everyone came alive from it.

We as a shul have a dear friend and regular guest, Rabbi Yehoshua Hartman. Everyone is in a good mood when he comes. Why? Because he is alive with wonder. He expresses joy and amazement. And love.

He once spoke from this pulpit and said how when he speaks to his children, every so often he interrupts the conversation and says – “Yechezkel – I just want you to know – I am crazy about you! You mean everything to me.” Wild? Maybe. But tell me, does not hearing something like that help uncork the heart, help us feel that much more, help us love that much more...?

Emotion is good. Very good.

In fact, a big part of Rosh Hashana is all about crying.

We are soon going to sound the *Shofar*. We are going to sound it many times; thirty times before *Mussaf*, another thirty times during *Mussaf*, and another forty times following *Mussaf*, for a total of one hundred times. The core obligation is said to be thirty times, but in truth it is much less than that. Really, all we need to hear is nine sounds of the *Shofar*, three sets of *Tekiah*, *Teruah* and *Tekiah*. The issue is that we are not quite sure how to sound a *Teruah*. The term ‘*Teruah*’ means a cry, יבבא, but we are not sure what kind of a cry. Is it a moan, גורוד גיח, the sound we call a *Shevarim*? Or is it a short sob, ילולי יליל, the sound we call a *Teruah*? Or is it a combination of the two, what we call *Shevarim-Teruah*? And so, because we are not sure what is meant by a cry, we cry every way we can imagine, and instead of nine sounds comprised of three sets of blasts with a cry in the middle of each, we need to have three different versions of three sets of blasts for every version of crying that we can think of, adding up to thirty blasts.

Amazing. On a day when we debate whether we may cry at all, we have as the central Mitzvah the sounding of the *Shofar* as a cry, and we work obsessively to make sure that it satisfies every possible definition of crying.

There is a profound idea here, one that often may go unnoticed. Because,

you see, the *Shofar* is not us crying; it is G-d Himself crying.

As we will read in the *Mussaf*, the *Shofar* of Rosh Hashana is a reminder of the *Shofar* of Sinai. At Sinai, we did not sound the *Shofar*; it was G-d who did. And it is the forebear of the great *Shofar* that will herald the coming of *Moshiach*. We will not sound that *Shofar*; G-d will. And so today when we sound the *Shofar*, we are projecting His voice. And it is He Who is crying.

Why?

We actually know what makes G-d cry. The Talmud (BT *Brachos* 3a) explains that three times every day, when Jews gather in their shuls and call out *יהא שמי' רבה מברך*, “*May G-d’s great name be blessed for eternity*,” G-d moans like a dove, reminded of the beauty of our allegiance to Him, and expressing His longing for us, His children, to be back at His table, in the Temple.

G-d cries because He misses us, because He longs for us, because He is waiting for us to come home. And when we send Him a message from far away, from wherever we gather to send Him that message, it stirs those feelings in Him again, and He cries for us more and longs for us more. And so on Rosh Hashana, when the Jewish people – G-d’s children – gather together in our shuls to declare our allegiance to Him, G-d cries – He moans and He sobs – because He misses us so much, and wants to have us back around His table.

The Tosafists (see BT *Rosh Hashana* 33b) explained the reason we do way more than thirty blasts, the reason we do one hundred, is to replicate the hundred cries attributed to the mother of *Sisra*. *Sisra* was the Canaanite general who was assassinated by Yael, turning the tide of an important battle. When Devorah sang celebrating the victory (*Shoftim* 5:28), she spoke of *Sisra’s* mother, crying as she waited in vain at her window for the victorious return of her son.

בעד החלון נשקפה ותיבב אם סיסרא בעד האשנב מדוע בשש רכבו לבוא מדוע  
אחרו פעמי מרכבותיו:

*Through the window the mother of Sisra looked forth, and peered through the window; why is his chariot late in coming? Why tarry the strides of his chariots?*

Why should we replicate the cries of *Sisra’s* mother on this holy day? She was not even a *Yiddishe Mameh*!?

But there is no better metaphor for G-d’s cries, the true cries of the *Shofar*.

We must imagine Hashem, waiting by the window for His beloved children to come home to Him.

We are those children. He is crying for us, waiting for us.

Do those tears make you sad? Or do those tears make you profoundly beloved and cared for? Those tears are G-d saying – “I just want to tell you – I am crazy about you. I am so excited to see you again. Yes, I saw you many times since last Rosh Hashana, but you were sort of going through the motions, getting through life. Now you are back, you are really back.”

Those tears should generate ours. Hearing G-d cry, longing for us. Hearing and seeing emotion – awaken emotion. *בכה הבכה בלילה – בוכה ומבכה. אחרת עמה.*

When Yosef was reunited with his father after twenty two years of absence (*Bereishis* 46:29), the verse describes their embrace, and says that “he cried continuously on his neck.” *Rashi* explains that it was Yosef who was crying, but *Ramban* disagrees and notes that it is far more likely that it was Yaakov who was crying, continuing on the tears he had been shedding non-stop for all the preceding years.

ודבר ידוע הוא מי דמעתו מצויה, אם האב הזקן המוצא את בנו חי לאחר היאוש והאבל, או הבן הבכור המולך.

*It is clear – whose tears would be more likely to flow? Those of the elderly father who finds his son alive after despair and grief? Or those of that son who has been (busy) governing (the foreign land)?*

We do not want to play the part of that child. If there was one issue the Sages raised about Yosef, it was that he could carry on in life in a way that seemed oblivious to his father’s copious tears (see *Rashi* to *Bereishis* 39:6). If our father is crying over missing us, we should cry as well.

Prayer presents that opportunity. As the *Maharal* of Prague (*Be’er HaGolah* 4) explained, prayer is not something that we recite formally while we try to add a little *כוונה* - a little feeling - “on top”. A prayer is *עבודה שבלב*, Service of the Heart, an expression of the most profound yearning in our heart, of what we want with all our heart. When we pray we are responding to G-d’s invitation to us: “You think about things that are so important to you, things that fill your heart, your mind and your thoughts. Those thoughts may be so much on your minds and hearts – but you may have no one that you are able to share them with. Please, come share those

thoughts, those dreams, with Me. Those cries of the *Shofar* – that is the sound of My passion, of My yearning for you. It is what fills My heart. You are here and I am crying. Please do not remain impassive. Please join your tears to Mine. Cry with Me in the joy of connection.”

It is hard for me to tell you to cry. But what we can all say to ourselves and to each other is that we can work harder to bring ourselves to feel. And maybe hearing G-d cry, so happy to see us, yearning so much for us, can help.

Our chance to cry is when we pray. Not when we recite a script, but when we express our heartfelt yearnings and prayers.

We must not let those words of prayer tumble out of our mouths in a torrent. We must read the script with expression, and we must join to it our own words, coming from the deepest recesses of our hearts, expressing our most profound wishes, dreams and desires.

That is how Rabbi Trenk *davened*. In his lifelong and constant effort to feel and to bring others to feel, he said every *Bracha*, every blessing and prayer, with expression, with feeling, as one would speaking the glorious words to G-d Himself.

When he was dying, a month before his death, he named a grandson at the Bris. I saw a film of him doing it.

אלקינו ואלקי אבותינו קיים את הילד הזה לאביו ולאמו...ישמח האב ביוצאי  
חלציו ותגל אמו בפרי בטנה.

*Our G-d, the G-d of our fathers – preserve this child for his father and mother... let the father rejoice in his offspring and may the mother delight in that which came from her.*

He said it with such feeling, with such expression, such longing. A grandfather, dying, looking at his new grandson, praying that his parents be allowed to delight in him forever, to never be separated. The precise image of a parent crying over the children he loves, who he is – in a sense – seeing from a distance. Those are not words recited. Those are words expressed. Those are Hashem’s cries...

Let us pray with heart and soul. Let us hear G-d’s cries, and let us not restrain ourselves – let us join in.

It is good to cry.

# Opening Our Hearts and Eyes To Others

## *Second Day of Rosh Hashana*

Uncovering our hearts is essential to opening up our own feelings, but it is equally critical to open ourselves up to the feelings of others.

Several months ago, right before *Shavuot*, I had the privilege to pay a visit that had a deep impact on me. The visit was to JEWELS, an inclusion school developed several years ago by a group of Baltimore parents who were intimately familiar with the challenges of raising a child with profound special needs. While, in the past, parents in our community had taken advantage of the existing schools outside the Jewish community that were equipped to service their children, this group of parents could not see themselves depriving their children of the chance to be educated and raised in a thoroughly Jewish environment. So they applied themselves with tremendous courage, love, and commitment, and with even more wisdom to create a successful and sustainable model of a school that could nurture, grow, and educate their precious children and the many, many other special children of our growing community. The result is JEWELS.

It is an unbelievable experience to visit JEWELS.

I do not recall ever being in a place where there was so much love in the air. I know that sounds a bit trite, but that is the reality. The teachers, the therapists, the administrators, everyone – showed so much love for the children, both those with a full range of developmental disabilities as well as their typically developing peers. The kids are literally treated like the jewels that they are, with patience, encouragement, and love, and with a determination to bring them to their next milestone.

Over the years I have had hours of conversations with parents of children with special needs who have shared their challenges and who have let me in on the difficult decisions they face. But I just did not get it. I did not nearly begin to understand.

I still do not understand. I do not know what it is like to live with that specific challenge, day after day, morning and night; the rigor of constantly being “on” in the present, and the task of imagining and planning for an unknown future. I do not have any idea what that is like.

That visit helped me realize that I had no clue. Seeing what those in-

credible teachers and therapists were doing. Seeing how they greeted the often very tired parents bringing their children to school, with understanding and love. They were there for the parents as people who understood a little bit of their challenge and who would join them in meeting it. What an incredible gift! I can only imagine how the role of these teachers in their children's lives and their enthusiasm about their children's progress, must help the parents appreciate their own beloved children so much more.

I share this story as an example. The people around us face myriad challenges. Whether the issue is financial or legal; whether of a child with special needs or a child who is struggling to find his or her way; challenges of personal or familial emotional health or addiction; of being alone; of seeking one's own mate, or helping a child to find theirs; of infertility or of critical illness, or of bereavement. Everyone has a "peckel", and nobody else has a clue. It is something for us to think about.

But it is not something for us to give a passing thought to. It is something for us to completely stop what we are doing, to take a break from thinking about our own personal concerns, for now or for the future, and think instead about what someone else is facing. We should stop to think about what daily life is like for the person you know who is dealing with a very ill spouse. To think about what daily life is like for the person who is in dire financial straits. To think about what daily life is like for the person without a familial support system. To think about what daily life is like for the single parent, for the orphan.

No, it is not enough for us to consider it for a moment. For us as the onlooker, we may feel that we can fulfill our requirement of empathy by taking note of the other's challenge, acknowledging it, and moving on. But that does not do it, because for that person the issue is ongoing. It is "life".

In the Torah (*Vayikra* 26:42), G-d promises וזכרתי את בריתי יעקב ואף את בריתי אברהם וזכרתי את בריתי יצחק ואף את בריתי אברהם וזכרתי את בריתי יצחק ואף את בריתי אברהם וזכרתי את בריתי יצחק ואף את בריתי אברהם. "I shall remember my covenant with Yaakov, and also my covenant with Yitzchak, and my covenant with Avraham I shall recall." The presentation is a bit difficult, as it uses the term "remembrance" explicitly regarding only two of the three Avos (patriarchs).

The Sages (see *Rashi* there) explain that in the case of Yitzchak, G-d did not need to recall him, as his ashes lie piled before Hashem always. One does not need to "remember" that which is present.

It is an unusual statement. But perhaps we can readily see it as a simple reciprocation from G-d. Avraham was willing to offer his son, his only and his beloved son, to G-d. That would make him a bereaved parent. A bereaved parent carries their child with them everywhere, all the time. Yes, at some point after *Shiva*, after *Shloshim*, after the first year, they get themselves together with G-d's help. They do not stop living. They continue, they function, they work, they converse, and they even smile. But there is a hole that is never filled, a void that is forever. And so G-d simply said – if Avraham was willing to sacrifice his son, if he was willing to carry that loss with him every day for the rest of his life for My sake, then I will carry that readiness, his commitment to Me, with Me every day forever.

Hashem knew what that challenge would mean for Avraham. He knew that it was not a moment of sacrifice, an act that would be “one and done”, or even one that would require a recovery period. Hashem knew that this sacrifice would be something that Avraham would live with every single day. **צבור ומונח לפניו**. Constantly present before his eyes.

Can we claim to be people with true feeling for each other, if we do not look in each other's eyes, if we do not take the time and the thought to really consider what life is like for another, how life may have changed for another?

Several years ago, a boy in Lakewood, New Jersey was hit in the head by a thrown baseball bat and was critically hurt. He died a few weeks before his Bar Mitzvah. Rabbi Dovid Trenk did not know the family but went to pay a *Shiva* call. Very nice. But then, a week later he called the father to see how he was doing. And he did the same thing the next week, and the next week, and the next week, and the next week. He was not “*yotzei*”, he did not fulfill his obligation of empathy with a visit. He did not check it off the list. If this person was going to live with it every day of his life, the least he could do was to acknowledge it, to join him there at least for a few minutes, every week of his life. **צבור ומונח לפניו**.

Eleven years ago, a young father drowned on a holiday outing with his family. It was a huge tragedy, leaving a young wife and several orphaned children. My wife's sister and her husband knew the family and wanted to be helpful. So, they brought soup to the *Shiva* house. But then they made and brought to the house the Friday night meal, and joined the family for it, so there would be a man of the house to make *Kiddush* and more. And they did that virtually every Friday night that they were not out of town for many years, until BH the widow remarried. **צבור ומונח לפניו**.



Thirty-two years ago, in the summer of 1982, Avremi Motzen was killed in a tank battle in the First Lebanon War. The officer who came to inform his parents describes himself coming to their home and sitting with this couple, both of whom had numbers tattooed on their arms, Auschwitz survivors. And here he was, telling them that their beloved son had been killed.

Avremi had been a student in Yeshivat Shaalvim in Israel. His friends grieved his loss and wanted to do something to address the grief of Avremi's parents. They resolved to come to the house one evening every two or three weeks, to learn Torah together for an hour. They did this for thirty-seven years. They did this as long as Avremi's father was alive, and then continued until this past May, when his mother passed away in her 90's.

They knew the pain would not go away. And so, they resolved not to go away. צבור ומונח לפניו.

And finally, a more modest, reachable story. The story of a family whose neighbor passed away, leaving a widow with an empty nest. Every *Motzei Shabbos* thereafter, the entire family would go over to her house for *Havdalah*. Every *Motzei Shabbos* for years. צבור ומונח לפניו.

We are in the midst of a worldwide explosion of anxiety and depression. The prevalence of these conditions is growing and growing. In a recent conversation with a friend who heads a Jewish organization dedicated to mental health, he explained to me that this is now one of their two principle areas of focus – understanding and addressing the spike in depression and anxiety.

Where is it coming from?

Research is beginning to show that the increase is the clear consequence of another spike – loneliness. We are the loneliest society in human history. There was a recent study that asked Americans, “Do you feel like you're no longer close to anyone?” 39 percent of people said that described them! “No longer close to anyone.”

Author Johann Hari wrote a book called *Lost Connections*. In it he speaks of a South African psychiatrist named Dr. Derek Summerfield who happened to be in Cambodia in 2001, when they first introduced chemical antidepressants for people in that country. The local doctors, the Cambodians, had never heard of these drugs, and they said to him, “We don't need them, we've already got antidepressants.” He thought they were going to tell him about some kind of herbal remedy, but instead, they told him a story.

There was a farmer in their community who worked in the rice fields. One day, he stood on a land mine left over from the war with the United States, and he got his leg blown off. They made him an artificial leg, and after a while, he went back to work in the rice fields. Apparently it is super painful to work under water when one has an artificial limb, and it was traumatic to go back and work in the field where he had gotten blown up. He began to spend all day crying and refused to get out of bed, developing all the symptoms of classic depression. The Cambodian doctor said, “This is when we gave him an antidepressant.” And Dr. Summerfield said, “What was it?”

They explained that they went and sat with him. They listened to him. They realized that his pain made sense, that it had perfectly understandable causes. One of the doctors, talking to the people in the community, figured, “You know, if we bought this guy a cow, he could become a dairy farmer, and he wouldn’t have to go and work in the rice fields.” They bought him a cow. Within a couple of weeks, his crying stopped, within a month, his depression was gone. They said to Doctor Summerfield, “So you see, doctor, that cow, that was an antidepressant.”

What those Cambodian doctors knew intuitively, based on this individual, unscientific anecdote, is what the leading medical body in the world, the World Health Organization, has been saying for years based on the best scientific evidence.

If you are depressed, if you are anxious, you may be a human being with unmet needs. And – to quote Johann Hari – “It’s just as important to think here about what those Cambodian doctors and the World Health Organization are not saying. They did not say to this farmer, ‘Hey, buddy, you need to pull yourself together. It’s your job to figure out and fix this problem on your own.’ On the contrary, what they said is, ‘We’re here as a group to pull together with you so that together we can figure out and fix this problem.’ This is what every depressed person deserves.”

Now, it is true that medication certainly has a place in the treatment of depression. And it is also true that the straightforward solutions – the “cows” – do not always so readily present themselves. But the listening – the community – the fact that someone understands what I am going through – that is an important part of the solution. The Cambodian rice farmer was already on the road to recovery when those doctors, when those friends, came to sit with him to try to understand his sadness.

Because many times the correct diagnosis is not “depression”. It is “dis-connection”.

But who has time for connection? Who has energy to listen? Who has developed those skills? Who wants to?

Indeed, the Talmud (BT *Pesachim* 113b) has a remarkable teaching. ג' חייהן אינם חיים הרחמנים והרתחנים ואיני הדעת. “Three people’s lives are not “life” – the extremely merciful, the temperamental, and the finicky.” People can be so sensitive that they are constantly “set off”. This is an issue whether they are set off by self-focused things, such as things that make them angry or uncomfortable, or whether they are set off by being overly sensitive to what every other person in the world is going through. It is true – one cannot spend all day considering and living the difficulties of others.

But while that may be true for everyone – i.e. that we cannot sit and absorb the challenges of everyone in the world – do we not need to be there for *someone*? And even if we must not be completely absorbed in the difficulties of others – does it not nevertheless behoove us to think about the people around us, to notice and to really care? That Talmudic passage is not a license for apathy, it is a mandate for balance.

Yes, if every time we read a newspaper we stop at every story and contemplate the consequences, the human costs, the struggles and the pain that each story, each number in the story, represents, we would not be able to live. But if we do not stop to look in the eyes of the people around us, if we do not spend the time and the energy to contemplate the consequences and the human costs being paid out in the lives of the people around us, even of those who live in our homes or were raised in our homes, then we can also say we have no life.

If we do stop to look, to consider, to care, and – critically – to share, then we have life, and we grant life.

There is a classic question posed around the Torah reading of the first day of Rosh Hashana. Immediately preceding that reading it tells the story of Sarah being taken by *Avimelech*, and of the plague of barrenness that had struck his household as a result, but that was relieved when Avraham – upon Sarah’s release – prayed on their behalf (*Bereishis* 20:17). The Talmud (BT *Bava Kamma* 92a) notes that immediately following this story we are told וד' פקד את שרה, that G-d had remembered Sarah and blessed her with a child. This, explains the Talmud, was because Avraham had prayed for another, even though he had the very same need. One who demonstrates

that kind of selflessness will indeed be answered first. Evidently prayer for others is more effective and virtuous than prayer for oneself.

The difficulty rises from the very same reading (*Bereishis* 21:17), where we read about *Yishmael* dying of thirst in the desert. *Hagar* cannot bear what her son is going through, and so she places him beneath the shelter of a bush and moves some distance away where she raises her voice and weeps. G-d then hears the voice of the child and calls out to *Hagar*, saying – “Do not fear, for G-d has heard the voice of the child...”. *Rashi* there notes that it was the child’s cries who were heard, not those of his mother, “For the prayer of the ill person himself is more powerful than that of the prayers of others on his behalf.”

At first glance these two neighboring observations are in conflict. In the first case Avraham’s prayer is given extra impact because it is for others, whereas in the latter case, *Yishmael’s* prayer is heard because it is for himself. How do we reconcile these two conflicting sources?

The difference is clear. In the first case, Avraham was really praying for *Avimelech*. He was not forced to; he chose to. *Avimelech* had apologized to him, had made good to him. He held nothing against him; in fact, he wanted him to thrive. Avraham saw their suffering and he wanted to do his part to ameliorate it. There is nothing more powerful to G-d, no prayer more welcome, than a prayer that is a fulfillment of *ואהבת לרעך כמוך*, of our mandate to care for each other.

*Hagar’s* prayer, on the other hand, was not for her child. *Hagar* was upset by his suffering, but she was out to relieve her own pain over her son’s suffering, not his, witness the fact that she distanced herself from him even as he was suffering and dying. If her concern was truly his pain, she would have stood by him in his suffering. But her concern was her own share of her child’s pain, so she moved away and cried. She moved to where she would not have to observe, not have to see and to share the depth of his pain. As such, she did not really know what he was feeling, and so her prayer for him was necessarily deficient.

*Hagar* averted her eyes from the suffering of her own son. Avraham chose to focus on the suffering of strangers.

Avraham defines our legacy, our path in life. It was Avraham’s prayer for Sodom that established the format of prayer for the Jewish people, the original morning prayer, *אבררה תקן תפילה שחרית*. That may be the reason the *Arizal* taught that before praying one must accept upon himself the *Mitzvah* of loving one’s fellow man, as it was that love and concern for the people of Sodom that motivated the original Jewish prayer.

To look, to pay attention, to care.

There is a well-known prophesy (*Yeshayahu* 52:8) that declares, **בי עין בעין יראו בשוב ד' ציון**. “For the eye with an eye shall witness when G-d returns to Zion.” There are many meanings given to this enigmatic phrase, **בי עין בעין יראו**. Perhaps we can suggest another somewhat homiletic meaning. Our difficult period, our exile, like every exile, is characterized by loneliness, by people retreating into themselves – **נסתמו עיניהם ולבם של ישראל מצרת** – **השעבוד**, “The eyes and the hearts of the Jews were closed by the pain of the exile.” Redemption comes when we transcend that, when we have someone like Moshe who leaves the safety of his personal refuge to look and to feel the anguish of his brethren (see *Rashi* to *Bereishis* 47:28; to *Shemos* 2:11).

**בי עין בעין יראו**. When we look each other in the eye, when we stop to consider the pain of the other, then G-d will return to Zion. When our lives, our cares, and our prayers are focused not just on ourselves, but on a deep searching look at those around us, then G-d will respond in kind, **וירא** **אלקים את בני ישראל וידע אלקים**, G-d Himself will look that much more deeply at our suffering and He will hear and respond.

# רחמנא ליבא בעי: G-d Seeks our Hearts

## Shabbos Shuva

The very last Mishna in *Yoma* (85b) brings a famous statement of Rabbi Akiva:

אמר רבי עקיבא אשריכם ישראל לפני מי אתם מטהרין ומי מטהר אתכם אביכם שבשמים שנאמר (יחזקאל לו) וזרקתי עליכם מים טהורים וטהרתם.

*Rabbi Akiva said: Happy are you, Israel! Who is it before whom you become pure? And who is it that purifies you? Your Father who is in heaven, as it is said: "And I will sprinkle pure water upon you and you shall be purified." (Yechezkel 36:25)*

The continuation of that verse is even more dramatic:

ונתתי לכם לב חדש ורוח חדשה אתן בקרבכם והסרתני את לב האבן מבשרכם ונתתי לכם לב בשר: ואת רוחי אתן בקרבכם ועשיתי את אשר בחקי תלכו ומשפטי תשמרו ועשיתם:

*And I will grant you a new heart and a new spirit I shall place within you, and I shall remove the heart of stone from your flesh and grant you a heart of flesh. And my spirit I shall place within you and I will make it (natural) for you to follow My laws and observe my rules and fulfill them.*

The process of Teshuva – the divine assistance that completes the task that we must initiate – is that G-d will grant us a different heart, a heart of flesh to replace our hearts of stone. That is the definition we are given of purity. Holy water does not do it. A change of heart. A softening of the heart.

When Pharaoh's heart was hardened, it made it such that he would not be impressed by the outstandingly impressive and enlightening things that he saw. It made it such that he would not change his mind, he would not give in or submit to the "evidence", to the visible power and truth of Hashem and His interest in the freedom of the Jewish people. And it made him ruthless and cruel to the Jewish people.

The Talmud (BT *Succah* 52a) notes that *יצר הרע*, the Evil Inclination was given seven names in the Tanach (Scripture): G-d referred to it as "Bad", Moshe as "Covered (heart)"; David as "Impure", others as "Enemy", "Stumbling Block", "Sneak". But *Yechezkel* called it *אבן*, "Stone", based on this verse, that speaks of the heart of stone. The essence of our challenge

is in our being hardened, our immunity to feeling for others and to being impressed and inspired.

Our hearts may be covered, may be hardened. We recognize it. We are frustrated by the lack of feeling. And our task is therefore to gain the purity of a softened heart, of activated and enlivened feelings.

I do not think we have to make the case for the importance of bringing our feelings back to life. People seem to relate very well to this challenge. We want to be more alive with feeling; we want to live lives with greater presence, to do things less mechanically; to have aspirations and excitement; to care more for each other.

Today we will explore three aspects in which we need to activate the heart. **We will discuss the importance of restoring passion and feeling; of being genuine, פניו ולבו שוין, rather than acting a part that we do not feel; and of being caring to others.**

We will explore these through a single anecdote that appears in the Talmud in three different places with three different endings, and we will suggest that the three endings correspond to the three aspects of heart that we are focusing on.

The Talmud speaks of a contrast between the generations of the sage Rabba and that of Rav Yehuda. Rabba's generation was more broadly learned than Rav Yehuda's, as they had deep familiarity in all realms of Talmud study whereas Rav Yehuda's generation focused on the single area of *Nezikin*, the laws of damages. Yet, noted Rabba, when his generation needed rain they would cry out endlessly to no avail, whereas in the days of Rav Yehuda, once he removed his shoes as was normal on a day of fasting and prayer the rain would already begin to fall.

Why the difference?

Here is where the Talmudic accounts differ. In *Sanhedrin* (106b) Rabba makes the simple and broad observation that G-d seeks the heart, רחמנא ליבא בעי, as it says (Shmuel I 16;7), בן האדם יראה לעינים וד' יראה ללבב, "Man sees with the eyes while G-d sees through to the heart." But the distinction is made more specific in *Taanis* (24b), where Rabba says that while their actions appear identical, his generation was inferior, and in *Brachos* (20a) where Abaye noted how the earlier generations would sacrifice everything for Kiddush Hashem.

No matter the specifics of the interpretation, the notion that G-d seeks the heart, רחמנא ליבא בעי, is paramount. After all, the discussion is about

the outstanding responsiveness that they gained for their *tefillos*. As we know that *tefillah* - prayer - is עבודה שבלב, it simply stands to reason that the greater the heart, the more active and present the heart, the greater the effectiveness.

Thus, as we explore each approach, we will also try to see its connection to the heart, to the heart of the matter, in a way that will be “H empower our *tefillos* as well.

Let us look more closely at each account.

### **Living with Passion**

“The earlier generations would sacrifice everything for *Kiddush Hashem*.” The illustration the Talmud (BT *Brachos* 20a) provides of this is a shocking one, as it tells of Rav Ada bar Ahava who saw something profoundly inappropriate and stepped up without hesitation to forcefully object. His action was something of a latter-day version of the zealotry of Pinchas, and apparently merited similar divine approval. This observation comes as a follow-up to a discussion and citation of the principle that אין חכמה ואין עצה ואין תבונה לנגד ד’ “There is no wisdom, counsel or understanding – no rationale – that should stand in the way of Hashem’s honor.” A mandate for passion in religious life.

Passion is one expression of the heart. Do we have genuine feelings invested in our actions, or are they mechanical, external? The role of passion is immense. The malaise of superficial action is deep.

Our original forebear is Shem, the son of Noach. When Shem heard that his father Noach was exposed, he was moved to act immediately to protect his dignity. He got his brother Yepheth to join him, and together they covered their father. *Rashi* (*Bereishis* 9:23) cites the words of the Sages, that they were both ultimately rewarded with their own coverings. Shem’s descendants merited the Mitzvah garment of the *Tallis*, while Yefeth’s descendants merited proper burial.

The Maharal of Prague (*Gur Aryeh*) explains these different rewards as follows. Shem was internally motivated to help his father. He had live and reactive sensitivities. His soul sensed and responded to the problem. As such he merited a living garment of Mitzvah. Yefeth, on the other hand, was not motivated to do anything on his own. His sensitivity – his heart – was not alive and responsive. He just went along with Shem’s passion. As such, his participation was that of a body alone, pulled along by the soul of another, and as such all that he merited was covering for



the lifeless, soulless, body.

Passion as an internal driver means that we are a living person, rather than a mechanical body.

*Yeshayahu* (29:13) famously rebuked the Jewish people for superficial, non-passionate service of G-d:

ויאמר ד' יען כי נגש העם הזה בפיו ובשפתיו כבדוני ולבו רחוק ממני ותהי יראתם  
אתי מצות אנשים מלמד:

*G-d said, because this nation is pressured/posturing; with their mouths and lips they pay me honor, but their hearts are distant from me; their fear of me is rote.*

There is a dispute amongst commentaries as to how to read this verse, with some reading it as referring to the people feeling pressured, with that pressure resulting in a heartless service of G-d. Pressure leaves a person pulled in many different directions, rather than being motivated to go in any particular direction.

In a world of many obligations – such as our world of Torah – there are pressures. Our lives as Jews cannot just be filled with those things we choose to be interested in. Fear of Heaven means we do things we do not yet understand, because we must. But that is not what נגש – pressured – means.

To be pressured means to just be rushing from one thing to the other, to feel an urgency in everything that we do, to be thinking about the next thing when we are doing this thing, such that we are never really involved in anything at all. It is not just *Mitzvos* that are done mechanically; under pressure, all of life is lived mechanically.

We first encounter the נוגש, the oppressor, in Pharaoh's Egypt, when Pharaoh's heart hardened and he had the taskmasters intensify the demands on the Jews, maintaining their quotas while providing them with less (*Shemos* 5:10). This was part of the known strategy of Pharaoh that would demoralize the Jewish people by making them too busy to dream the dream of freedom, too pressured to think beyond completing the next day's task. The נוגש, the oppressor, successfully shrinks the spirit – קוצר רוח - of the oppressed.

We live in a highly pressurized society. But can we allow ourselves to be carried along like lifeless bodies without internal motivation? Can we allow ourselves to give up our lives? To give up our souls?

We must stop, slow down, and savor what we are doing such that we may rekindle motivation.

The passionate person lives with wonder. He does not get bored and tired, left as a creature mechanically carrying on the routine.

The passionate person does not allow himself to get used to good things, to cease to be grateful for them.

The Torah reading on Tisha B'Av is from *Parshas VaEschanan* (Devarim 4:25), which also happens to be that week's *Parsha*. We read then the section of **כִּי תוֹלִיד בָּנִים וּבְנֵי בָנִים וְנוֹשְׁתָּם בְּאֶרֶץ**, "When you will bear children and grandchildren and become 'old' in the land, and thus become corrupt...". It is when we become old and jaded, used to being here, forgetting the miracles and the hand of G-d that has brought us to where we are – that is when we fail.

By contrast, later in that same *Parsha* (Devarim 6:7) we have the reading of the *Shema*: **וְהָיוּ הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוְךָ הַיּוֹם עַל לִבְךָ וְשִׁנְתָם לְבָנֶיךָ**. "These words that I am instructing you today shall be upon your heart, and you shall teach them to your children...". Here the verse instructs us as to how to do things right. It tells us to feel each day as if our Torah was taught to us on that very day, **הַיּוֹם**, that it is not something old at all. *V'shinantam* - we are to teach them – with sharpness and an excited edge – to our children, to the next, fresh generation.

Fascinatingly the same Hebrew letters spell **וְשִׁנְתָם**, the term used for becoming old and jaded, and **וְשִׁנְתָם**, the term for passing on a sharp and fresh tradition to the next generation. In a sense it is on this that everything turns. Are we old, tired, dull, and mechanical? Or are we fresh and young, sharp and present?

A person can get used to anything. Dr. David Pelcovitz speaks about the time that he was in Hawaii for a conference, and he sat outside on the oceanside patio in the morning, marvelling at the beauty of the ocean and the surroundings. He commented on them to a waiter, who was cleaning up. The waiter just shrugged. He was used to it. He did not see the beauty because he saw the beauty every day. We become blind to the gifts that surround us, to **יּוֹם עִמָּנוּ**, the daily miracles we live with.

We had a man in our shul, Rav Yehuda Friedman. He was an outstandingly special man, a Holocaust survivor who was privileged to raise a beautiful family. There came a point where he regularly had *Simchos*, whether a grandchild's wedding or the birth or bar mitzvah of a great grandchild. He has been gone for years, but I remember like yesterday

how he stood by the door of my office after telling me the latest news of a *simcha*, almost bashfully, and how he would pause, get a far-away look in his eyes, and say, “Who could have imagined? Where we were... where we are....”

היום, “today”. He did not let it get old. It was shocking, amazing, and it needed to stay fresh and wondrous.

People who have a brush with death suddenly appreciate life. The gift of life is there all the time, but we become used to it, blind to it.

That is the mandate of היום, “today” – as if you just got it today, saw it today. Do not get used to things, avoid ונשתמם. Stop and think and appreciate. It is incredible what we lose by getting used to things and taking them for granted.

When we are grateful, we are so much more alive.

We live היום when we make things new, when we are not static, when we do not do the same thing over and over again, when we grow and change and innovate. That is when we are alive and feeling.

The Talmud (BT *Brachos* 29b) says a real prayer is not קבע, routine, but rather דבר לחדש בו דבר, it needs novelty all the time, something different, something new. In the introduction to the *Siddur HaGra*, the author makes the same point, explaining that the purpose of his commentary on the prayer book was the need for new insights that would enliven prayer. העושה תפילתו קבע אין תפילתו תחוננים.

*Radak* (Rav David Kimche) in his commentary on the verse quoted above from *Yeshayahu* (29:13), notes that the *Mitzvos* are dispassionate and seem to repeat themselves without creativity when performed by the fearful and the obedient; the passionate are creative, going beyond what they are asked and what they are accustomed to.

On Tisha B'Av we shared a remarkable insight from HaRav Shimon Schwab on the verse with which we end the reading of *Eicha*: “השיבנו ד' אליך ונשובה חדש ימינו כקדם”, “Return us to You, Hashem, so that we may return; renew our days as *Kedem*, as the days of old.” The Sages saw this reference to *Kedem* as an allusion to *Gan Eden* which is described as מקדם, “in *Kedem*”, in the east. However, the verse brought by the Sages to support this is not the one we would expect:

השיבנו ה' אליך ונשובה חדש ימינו כקדם. כאדם הראשון כמאן דאמר (בראשית ג') ויגרש את האדם וישכן מקדם לגן עדן: (איכה רבה ה, כא)

The Sages, instead of citing one of the many verses that describe the Garden of Eden in *Kedem* as such, choose instead the verse that describes Adam being banished from the garden, where the Torah (*Bereishis* 3:24) says, “And He drove the man out, and He stationed from the east (m’Kedem) of the Garden of Eden the cherubim and the blade of the revolving sword, to guard the way to the Tree of Life.” Why did they choose this verse that describes man’s banishment rather than his bliss? Are we not asking G-d to bring us all the way home?

Rabbi Schwab answered by citing an ancient source, רבינו תם בספר הישר, שער העשירי, that noted that there are many opportunities for *Teshuva*, but the prime time for it is immediately after the wrong is committed. Right at the moment of failure, when the feelings are raw, when there has been no resignation to a lowered reality or expectation – that is the greatest opportunity for restoration.

We do not ask G-d to accept us as if nothing happened. We know we have work to do to get there. He cannot just put us back in the Garden of Eden. What we do ask is that G-d should scrape away the resignation, the callousness that has accumulated about where we are. We ask Hashem to bring us back to that moment where man found himself stunned, expelled from the Garden, banished from G-d’s presence, transformed negatively by his failure to do what he was supposed to. We are asking G-d to help us feel uncomfortable with our reduced status. Then we have a chance to earn our way back.

All we need to get back to is to the stage where we are still experiencing shock and dismay at what is wrong, instead of having become accustomed to it. We need the passion of aspiration, the sensitivity that burns within.

*Rabbenu Yonah*, in the second paragraph of the *Shaarei Teshuva*, cites the Midrash (*Koheles Rabba* 7:15) that compares the one who passes up the opportunity to do *Teshuva* to a group of bandits who were imprisoned, and who dug a tunnel to escape from the cell. When the warden came by, he found them all gone except for one, and he became infuriated with him: “The tunnel is there for you to escape! How could you stay here?”

But the reality is that prisoners do sometimes prefer to stay. They have dialed down their expectations of life; they have grown accustomed to a “new normal”. And that is tragic.

When we cry out, חודש ימינו כקדם, “Renew our days as of old,” what we seek is

to feel the raw pain of being less than we can be, of being banished from where we could have been. Just as we all know that the greatest danger in *Galus* (exile) is to stop yearning for home, so too the greatest danger of life in general is to stop yearning and striving to be better.

Our Sages (BT *Kiddushin* 40a) said it simply; when a person does something wrong and then does it again, it becomes to him like something permitted. כיון שעבר אדם עבירה ושנה בה נעשית לו כהיתר. We are used to it. We are resigned to it.

We get used to bad things, to being less than we can be.

All of these are components of an overall loss of passion, of internal motivation. We succumb to the pressures of life, and we allow ourselves to lose the sense of wonder at the privilege of our existence and our faith. We allow ourselves to lose the sense of horror about that which is wrong.

We naturally understand that if prayer is a recital, if it is not passionate, if it is a service of the lips rather than of the heart – it is so much farther away, so much more removed from effectiveness. We can understand that a generation where people truly felt their Judaism – where they responded with their own feeling to an affront to G-d, or enthusiastically joined in sanctifying His Name – that their prayers would be stronger.

Rav Kook (עין איה to *Brachos* 20a) went further and offered an amazing explanation on this first facet of why it was the passionate, those who sacrifice to sanctify Hashem's name, who act with passion, whose prayers are answered. He noted that prayer itself is the service of the heart, and this is so because in prayer we seek to transcend the natural, to go beyond it. It is only by a passion that transcends simple and practical calculations that we can go beyond nature. It is the prayer of those who are alive with unbridled passion that can bring the rain when it may naturally have been held back.

This is one meaning of נגש. And this is one aspect of the heart that G-d seeks – a heart that is passionate and grateful; where actions are done with internal motivation, not as a body being pulled around. Where we live with a sense of היום, “today”! Where the sensitivity to right and wrong is alive and well, and raw.

### **Living with Genuineness**

There is another aspect to נגש, and that relates to approaching Hashem, trying to make a good impression. Presenting ourselves one way, but not really meaning it. אין פיו ולבו שווין. Insincerity.

This is the approach taken by *Rashi* to that verse.

יען כי נגש העם הוזה – יונתן תירגם: "חלף דאיתרברב עמא הדין", כלומר: נגשו להגביה עצמם עד לשמים, הם מראים עצמם כמכבדים אותי בפה ובשפה, אבל את לבם הרחיקו ממני; ותהי יראתם אותי לא בלב שלם, כי אם מצות אנשים המלמדים אותם: התראו כנכנעים מלפניו, לפתותו בפייכם.

When one gets in the habit of projecting and posturing, of putting on an appearance, we disconnect our mouths, our faces, our world of actions, from our feelings. The standard becomes saying something not based on what is inside us, what we feel, but on what others want or need to see.

That is the beginning of the end of being real people.

Remarkably, the Torah prohibits us from hating our fellow Jew in our heart. Of course, the preference is not to hate at all, but if you cannot get rid of the hatred – show it. Do not destroy trust, do not kill reality and genuineness, by faking it.

In *Parshas Nitzavim* (*Devarim* 29:8), the Jewish people entered a covenant with G-d, Who in turn warned about the person who would give lip service to the covenant while not really committing to it in his heart. ודהתברך בלבבו לאמר שלום יהי לי. As the Torah goes on to describe, this attitude will truly anger Hashem and force a response.

It is surprising. One might have imagined that the Torah would reserve its fury for the person who truly accepted the covenant and then failed to fulfill it, whereas this person had in truth never really accepted it to begin with!

Yet indeed this is even more troubling. Failure is part of the human condition. We make commitments that we do not always live up to. But the person who feigns commitment, the person who pretends to be part of it in order to please the crowd but does not really mean it – that person is undermining our people much more fundamentally. Through him trust is eroded, truth is eroded, genuineness is lost.

And when genuineness is lost, then there is no continuity. Pretenders are not effective teachers or transmitters. The Torah indeed refers to the pretender as שורש פורה ראש ולענה, as a root from which bitter and poisonous growths will sprout. And as Ramban (*Devarim* 29:17) noted, in this the Torah is observing that the success of the one who hides his true feelings may work for him, but it will not work for his children, for his students.

They will see right through it.

This is the meaning of the second version of the Talmudic episode we had described, the version in *Taanis* 24b. Rabba noted that while our actions look identical to those of our predecessors, our generation is weaker. This is just another manifestation of *בעי ליבא רחמנא*, of G-d seeking the heart. The hearts of Rabba's contemporaries were less engaged. They were acting the part – identically in fact – but it was not genuine. Their Torah was – as noted in the version of *Sanhedrin* (106b) – superficial, *מן השפה ולחוץ*. And if it was not genuine it would not last. And – of course – if it was not genuine, it was not the service of the heart, the kind of prayer, that would yield rain. *קרוב ד' לכל קוראיו לכל אשר יקראוהו באמת*. “G-d is near to all who call on Him, **to all who call on Him in truth.**” (*Tehillim* 145:18)

### **Living with Real Concern and Joy for Others**

The third Talmudic passage (BT *Sanhedrin* 106b) speaks of Hashem seeking the heart. It speaks of the contrast between the generations as reminiscent of the failure of Do'eg and Achitofel. Do'eg and Achitofel were biblical personalities who lived in the times of Kings Saul and David, and who were deemed superficial in their engagement to Torah. But more than that, they were *אנשי דמים ומרמה*, people of blood and treason. They were murderous betrayers. They were not good to others.

The Talmud specifically notes how in the times of Rav Yehuda they were not preoccupied with areas of ritual law and purity, but with their obligations to each other, with the order of *Nezikin*, the laws of damages.

That preoccupation is rooted in the heart that cares for another. And restoring that heartfelt care has been our task since the destruction of the second *Bais Hamikdash*.

The Talmud (BT *Yoma* 9b) describes the sin of the period of that destruction as something hidden – *לא נתגלה עוונם*. They were good and social on the outside, but that facade hid a deep division, even a hatred, that was active on the inside. The Talmud prefers the open failures of the first *Mikdash*, where major and visible wrongdoing were the order of the day, to the subtle and pernicious rot of the internal and hidden hatred of the second.

The Talmud summarizes this by saying that the fingernails of the first were better than the insides of the second. The Gaon of Vilna understood this as referring to the two Kosher signs of an animal – one external, the split hoof, the fingernails, and the other internal, the chewing of the cud. Eisav is characterized by his misrepresentation of self, by a superficial

goodness, represented by the external kosher sign of the split hoof. Yaa-kov by contrast, needs to be both externally pleasant and genuinely caring, having an inside that truly cares and that loves.

It is beautiful to note that the section of the *Shulchan Aruch*, the Code of Jewish Law, that deals with *Nezikin*, with the laws of damages, is known as *Choshen Mishpat*, the term describing the breastplate worn by the *Kohein Gadol* (High Priest). The Talmud (BT *Shabbos* 139a) explains that this vestment sat on the heart of Aaron, as his heart rejoiced at his kid brother's ascent to greatness (*Shemos* 4:14). Moshe had been very concerned about assuming the leadership of the Jewish people, feeling that his ascension would slight his older brother Aaron, who had led the Jewish people faithfully in Egypt. G-d reassured Moshe, saying that when Moshe returns to lead the Jewish people, Aaron would see him *ושמח בלבו*, and his heart will rejoice.

After generations of Biblical struggles between competing siblings, we finally arrive at Aaron, the older sibling whose care and love for his brother results in a feeling of true joy at his kid brother's success. That heart of gold would be adorned with the *Choshen Mishpat*, with the gem-studded breastplate. And that breastplate would become the symbol of care and concern for one another, of the realm of Jewish law that governs that care and concern, *Nezikin*.

During the time of Rav Yehuda the Jewish people were obsessed with caring for each other, with not harming each other, with rejoicing at each other's success. That period stood in contrast to the period of hatred that destroyed the Temple. And that behavior was the very opposite of the superficiality of Do'eg and Achitofel, men of blood and treason.

And it was that genuineness of caring that made Rav Yehuda's prayer heard; that makes every *Tefillah* heard. And as we noted elsewhere, it is that genuineness of caring that motivated the original prayer of Avraham. It was Avraham's prayer for Sodom that established the format of prayer for the Jewish people, the original morning prayer, *אברהם תקן תפילת שחרית*, which may be the reason the *Arizal* taught that before praying one must accept upon himself the *Mitzvah* of loving one's fellow man.

And it is that kind of genuine concern for others that is the truest representation of Torah.

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai was the most dedicated of Torah scholars, who "never engaged in idle conversation, never walked four cubits with-



out engaging in Torah study and without donning phylacteries... no person ever found him sitting and silent, rather, he was always sitting and studying.” The Sages said about Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai that he did not neglect “Bible; Mishna; Gemara; *halakhot* and *aggadot*; minutiae of the Torah and minutiae of the scribes,” and many other areas of study (BT *Succah* 28a).

Yet it was that same Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai who was the first to greet everyone, even the non-Jew he encountered in the street. That is true Torah. A Torah that is reflected in the caring and giving personality.

Rav Yehuda Amital z”l, the founding Rosh Yeshiva of Har Etzion, would often repeat the Chasidic story about the *Baal HaTanya*, the first rebbe of Chabad, who was sitting and studying in the inner room of the house. His grandson, the *Tzemach Tzedek*, sat in the middle room. In the outer room there was a baby in a cradle. The baby suddenly awoke from his sleep and began to cry. The *Tzemach Tzedek* was so immersed in his study that he did not hear the baby crying, but the *Baal HaTanya*, whose room was further away, did hear. On his way back, he passed the room where the *Tzemach Tzedek* sat and told him, “When a person studies Torah and does not hear a cry for help, something is deficient in his learning.”

We have been focusing on uncovering the heart, bringing ourselves to truly feel. Ten Yom Kippurs ago, I shared with you a story that I would like to remind you of. It is a story made famous by Rav Shlomo Carlebach.

He told of a man he met at the Yarkon, the beach area in Tel Aviv, a survivor who worked as a street sweeper in that area. He called him the Holy Hunchback.

After he met him and they spoke for a few minutes, he discovered that this man came from Piaseczna, and that he had been a student of the famed Rav Klonymus Kalmish of Piaseczna, a Chasidic rebbe of Polish youth who had spent the last period of his life in the Warsaw Ghetto. Rav Shlomo was so eager to hear directly from a student of this great master, and he asked him to share with him something from his holy Rebbe, which he eventually did.

*He would always say, “Kinderlach, tairer kinderlach, my most precious children, gedenkst shon, remember, di greste zach in di velt ist zu tun mit emetzin a tova. Children, precious children, just remember the greatest thing in the world is to do somebody else a favor.”*

*When I came to Auschwitz, I knew my whole family had been killed and*

*I wanted to kill myself. Each time I was about to, I suddenly heard the Rebbe's voice saying to me, "Gedenkst shon, the greatest thing in the world is to do somebody else a favor." Do you know how many favors you can do in Auschwitz late at night? People dying, people crying; nobody had the strength even to listen to their stories anymore. I would be up all night listening to them, crying with them. A few weeks later I wanted to kill myself again but always at the last moment I'd hear my Rebbe's voice. Now I am here in Tel Aviv, but believe me, I'm all alone, there are moments when I despair. Then suddenly I hear my Rebbe's voice again and I just run back to the streets. Do you know how many favors you can do on the street?"*

That Yom Kippur, 5771, we prepared our first Yamim Noraim keepsake, a card that said that the greatest thing in the world is to do someone else a favor.

That card still hangs on the inside of our front door. It is something to live by. It is indeed the greatest thing in the world to do someone else a kindness.

### **Renewing and Uncovering the Heart**

This is our task as we seek to reconnect, to uncover the heart and accomplish genuine *teshuva*.

**We must restore the heart, for that is what Hashem seeks.** רחמנא ליבא בעי.

**We must restore the passion and excitement, living lives filled with gratitude and a sense of opportunity, not discharging obligations but finding passion. We must live with aspiration, not resignation.**

**We must be real. We must let our hearts truly show. We must not fool ourselves, nor work to project a different reality to others. Let us stop trying to be someone else.**

**And let us care for each other, for goodness sake!**

# Uncovering the Good

## *Kol Nidrei*

The following story was made famous earlier this summer by Rabbi Paysach Krohn:

*One Friday night, Rav Dovid Trenk was told that one of his students had found the keys to his car and had taken it to go to the movie theater.*

*It was Friday night – Shabbos. The student had stolen his car, violated Shabbos, and was sitting in a movie theater, something which the students were not supposed to be doing any night of the week.*

*Rabbi Trenk put on his jacket and his hat and walked the thirty minutes to the movie theater. When he arrived there, he approached the ticket window and said, “I am really sorry to bother you. I did not come to watch the movie, but I do have a student inside who is watching it and I just need to go in for a couple of minutes to tell him something.” After being given permission, Rabbi Trenk entered the darkened theater, and - trying very hard not to block anyone’s view - began to walk the aisles of the theater as he sought to recognize his student in the shadows. Eventually, he found him and slid into the seat next to the shocked student. He leaned over and whispered in his ear, “Chaim, I just wanted to make sure you knew that the popcorn here is probably not kosher.” With that he stood up and just as careful not to block anyone’s view, made his way out of the theater. He thanked the ticket agent and started walking back home, but within moments, he had company. “Rebbe, Rebbe – I am coming with you.” Chaim would walk him home.*

What a story!

But why?

If it were me – first, I would have to process my fury at the fact that the boy took my car without permission, essentially stealing it from me. Second, I would have to further deal with the fact that he took my car for a drive on Shabbos! And finally, that he would have the nerve to take it to a movie, breaking yet another rule in our relationship.

The Talmud has several passages where it discusses how a person can do one action that would bring upon himself a whole number of consequences and punishments, *יש אוכל אבילה אחת וחייב עליו חמש חטאות*. We sometimes refer to this as the “*Aveirah Olympics*”. Well, this would have been a suitable entry in the triathlon!

But Rabbi Trenk did not react that way. He did not get angry about the stolen car. He did not say a word – not then and not ever – about his student driving on Shabbos. He did not reprimand him for the movie. He just reminded him that the popcorn may not be kosher.

He was not angry; he cared.

And he had not given up on his beloved student. Yes, his student had stolen from him. Yes, his student had desecrated the holy Shabbos. Yes, his student was pursuing the wrong form of entertainment. But there was still so much good that could come from him. There was so much good already in him.

This is a crazy story. Hearing it, you can react in one of two ways. You can react in amazement, seeing a level of patience and love that you might have thought unimaginable. The story can expand your horizons and make you wish that you could start your parenting career, your teaching career, your life of relationships, all over again.

Or you could say that it is simply crazy. That nobody should be so patient, so indulgent. That someone needs to teach a child like that what consequences mean.

I am going to share with you a few more such stories. The stories are not all the same, but they are all overwhelmingly amazing, and – one might say - a bit crazy. But in between the stories, I am going to share with you some Torah ideas that will sound like the stories. They will sound just as crazy. But they are incredibly real, and totally relevant to Yom Kippur.

Rav Moshe Cordovero was a very important 16th century Kabbalist. He lived in Tzefat, where he was a student of Rav Yosef Karo, the author of the *Shulchan Aruch*, and of his brother-in-law, Rav Shlomo Alkabetz, the composer of *Lecha Dodi*. He was also a forerunner of the *Arizal*. His students included the author of *Reishis Chochma*, Rav Menachem Azarya of Fano (רמ"ע מפאנו), and Rav Chaim Vital. He published many books on Kabbalah, which are beyond my comprehension. But this great Kabbalist wrote one other book, a very small book, called *Tomer Devorah*. This book is very understandable, and in concept very applicable, but in practice – not so simple.

The goal of *Tomer Devorah* is to teach us about how G-d handles us, how He treats us and views us. It is to teach us the Divine example for human behavior, as the author writes in the preface, for we are created in the Divine Image, and the main expression of that image is in our behaviors. Thus, he taught, we must learn G-d's attributes so that we may emulate them.

It is a book filled with Rabbi Trenk stories. But these stories are about *Hashem*.

The first attribute he discusses is G-d's forbearance.

הא' – מי א-ל כמוך – מורה על היות הקדוש ברוך הוא מלך נעלב, סובל עלבון מה שלא יכולהו רעיון. הרי אין דבר נסתר מהשגחתו בלי ספק, ועוד אין רגע שלא יהיה האדם נוון ומתקיים מכח עליון השופע עליו, והרי תמצא שמעולם לא חטא אדם נגדו שלא יהי' הוא באותו הרגע ממש שופע שפע קיומו ותנועת אבריו, עם היות שהאדם חטא בכח ההוא לא מנעו ממנו כלל אלא סובל הקדוש ברוך הוא עלבון כזה להיות משפיע בו כח תנועות אבריו, והוא מוציא אותו כח באותו רגע בחטא ועון ומכעיס והקדוש ברוך הוא סובל... ועם כל זאת שהכח בידו להחזיר הכח הנשפע ההוא והיה לו לומר כיון שאתה חטא נגדי תחטא בשלך לא בשלי, לא מפני זה מנע טובו מן האדם אלא סבל עלבון, והשפיע הכח והטיב לאדם טובו. הרי זה עלבון וסבלנות מה שלא יסופר ועל זה קוראים מלאכי השרת להקדוש ברוך הוא מלך עלוב והינו אומרו מי א-ל כמוך, אתה א-ל בעל חסד המטיב, א-ל בעל כח לנקם ולאסוף את שלך, ועם כל זאת אתה סובל ונעלב עד ישוב בתשובה:

*The First Divine Attribute: "Who is a power like You", instructs about the Holy One, blessed be He, being a King Who tolerates inconceivable insult. Behold, nothing is hidden from His oversight, without a doubt, and yet there is no moment when a person is not nourished and preserved by the Highest force that flows upon him; and behold, you find that there was never a person who sinned against God, without Him - at that very instant - willing the flow of his existence and the movement of his limbs. While this person sins with that force, He does not withhold it from him at all. Rather, the Holy One, blessed be He, tolerates such an insult - to flow the power for the movement of his limbs into the person, and the person uses that power at that moment for sin and iniquity, and to anger Him; and the Holy One, blessed be He, tolerates it.*

Yes, we steal G-d's car all the time, to drive it when and where we are not supposed to.

In our own lives, we are keenly aware of the gifts we give others, and the expectations we have in return. We are upset and hurt when children, friends or employees seem to ignore our largesse, and do their own thing on our backs.

But that is what G-d allows us to do all the time. Our entire life, our entire being is a gift from G-d, constantly sustained by Him, and yet He does not seem to get hung up on the fact that we often use those gifts that He is granting us – at that very moment – against Him.

G-d is as indulgent as Rabbi Trenk.

*A mother called Mrs. Trenk, beside herself. Her young son, barely 15 years old, had no high school to attend. He had been turned down by no less than fourteen schools to which his parents had applied. As a result, he gave up on school and took a job in a local pharmacy, even though the job required him to make deliveries on Shabbos. What could she do? Mrs. Trenk suggested that perhaps her son would be interested to come to their yeshiva, but the mother said that there was no way he would agree to come to a high school with a reputation of being for troubled boys. Mrs. Trenk said to the mother that she would be very happy to have her son visit with them for Shabbos.*

*The mother did not expect the child to agree, but to her surprise he did, and he arrived at the Trenk's door on Friday afternoon. He was already bitter about Judaism, and so his idea of coming for Shabbos was to just be there at the house. He did not go to shul on Friday night or Shabbos day; he did not participate in any of the yeshiva activities or in the Oneg Shabbos. He just stayed at the house, spending much of the evening and day speaking with Mrs. Trenk. He stayed over Motzei Shabbos, and finally on Sunday morning Mrs. Trenk said, "Chaim, why don't you go over to the yeshiva for my husband's class?" Chaim of course resisted, but she encouraged him and finally he relented and went.*

*As he sat in the class, Rabbi Trenk shared a comment of Rashi, and asked a question about it to the boys. Chaim tentatively raised his hand and shared a thought. Rabbi Trenk stopped in his tracks. "Chaim, I have been teaching for forty years. Never – never! – have I heard such an explanation of a Rashi. Chaim, please give me your parents' phone number. I have to call them."*

*Chaim shared this story at Rabbi Trenk's shiva. Throughout his first ten years of schooling, never – never! – had a teacher ever called his parents to share something positive about him. There was too much other stuff that got in the way. But Rabbi Trenk saw the good in him. He noticed it. And Chaim stayed, and he grew, and the rest is wonderful history.*

We go back to the Tomer Devorah (1:7):

“כי חפץ חסד הוא – רוצה במה שישראל גומלים חסד ואותו צד מזכיר להם עם  
היות שאינם כשרים בצד אחר.”

אם כן בסדר זו ראוי לאדם להתנהג אף אם ראה שאדם עושה לו רע ומכעיסו  
אם יש בו צד טובה שמטיב לאחרים או מדה טובה שמתנהג כשורה יספיק לו צד  
זה לבטל כעסו מעליו וירצה לבו עמו ויחפץ חסד ויאמר די לי בטובה זו שיש לו:

*Since He is One who desires kindness, He desires the kindness which Israel does. And He recalls favorably that aspect, even as they are not fitting from another aspect.*

*If so, it is fitting for a person to practice this approach. If he sees a person doing evil to him and angering him – if there is a good side to that person, that he does good to others, or if he has a good trait that he practices appropriately, that side should suffice for him to nullify his anger from upon him.*

Imagine. G-d is just like Rabbi Trenk. Whereas we usually zero in on the negative in others such that it overshadows the good, Hashem does not let anything negative about us stop Him from seeing the good and the beautiful within us.

*Rabbi Trenk was attending the Bar Mitzvah of a young man he knew. The boy was one of the younger members of his family, and his older siblings were superstars, while he was already known as a handful. The dignitaries that spoke at his Bar Mitzvah found themselves in a pickle, and they spent the evening speaking about potential, about the potential greatness of this boy, as seen in his wonderful family members. The bar mitzvah boy did not even stay in for these painful speeches. He was out to the lobby with some friends. Rabbi Trenk could not take it. He went out to the lobby, and in a loud voice – and he could have a very loud voice – he spoke to Shmuel so that everyone in the hall could hear. “Shmuel – why didn’t they ask me to speak about you? I would have spoken about how energetic you are, the life and strength you bring to everything you do. I would have spoken about what a good friend you are, how loyal you are to your friends and how much you take care of them. I don’t understand Shmuel; why didn’t they ask me to speak about you?!”*

Back to the *Tomer Devorah* (1:9):

הח' – יכבש עונותינו – הרי הקדוש ברוך הוא מתנהג עם ישראל במדה זו והיא סוד כבישת העון. כי הנה המצות היא כפרחת עלתה נצה ובוקע ועולה עד אין תכלית לכנס לפניו יתברך אמנם העונות אין להם כניסה שם ח"ו אלא כבשם שלא יכנסו ... והינו יכבש עונותינו שאין העונות מתגברים לפניו כמצות אלא כובש אתם שלא יתעלו ולא יכנסו עם היות שהוא משגיח על דרכי איש הטוב והרע עם כל זה הטוב אינו כובשו אלא פורח ועולה עד למאד ונכלל מצוה במצוה ונבנה ממנו בנין ולבוש נכבד ועונות אין להם סגלה זו אלא כובש אתם שלא יצליחו הצלחה זו ולא יכנסו פנימה. אף מדה זו צריך האדם להתנהג בה שלא יכבש טובת חברו ויזכור רעתו שגמלהו אלא אדרבה יכבש הרע וישכחנהו ויזיחהו ולא יגור במגורו רע ותהיה הטובה סדורה תמיד לפניו ויזכר לו הטובה ויגביר לו על כל המעשים שעשה לו ולא ינבה בלבו ויאמר אם עשה לי טובה הרי עשה לי רעה וישכח

הטובה לא יעשה כן אלא ברעה יתרצה כל דרך רצוי שיוכל והטובה אל יזניחה לעולם מבין עיניו ויעלים עינו מן הרעה כל מה שיוכל בדרך שהקדוש ברוך הוא כובש עונות כדפרשת:

*The eighth attribute: "He suppresses our iniquities" – behold, the Holy One, blessed be He, acts with Israel with this trait... When He beholds a Mitzvah, 'it is like when it blossoms, its bud arises' and it pierces and climbs until no end, to enter in front of Him. But the iniquities, however, do not have passage there, G-d forbid. Rather, He suppresses them, such that they not enter ... even as He is supervising over the ways of a man, good and bad. Nonetheless, He does not suppress the good, but rather it blossoms and climbs until it grows very much, such that one Mitzvah is grouped together with another until a great edifice is built... But iniquities do not have this special quality, but He rather suppresses them, that they should not have this success, and not enter in front of Him.*

*A man needs to also practice this trait – to not suppress the good of his fellow and remember his evil that he did to him. Rather, just the opposite – he should suppress the evil, forget it, and neglect it, and 'evil shall not dwell in his domicile.' And the good should always be ordered in front of him, and he should remember his fellow's good. And he should intensify it over all the deeds that he has done to him... He should never neglect the good from being between his eyes; and avert his eye from the evil as much as he can, in the way that the Holy One, blessed be He, suppresses his iniquities.*

There goes G-d again, pulling a "Rabbi Trenk". He does not let a picture of us form based on the things we do that are not so good. Each one of those He may need to deal with, but in isolation, and at arm's length. The picture He constructs of us is in the fact the very opposite. The pieces of that portrait that Hashem keeps in front of Himself and holds on to in order to piece them together – those are the good things about us.

*A young man came for a Shabbos to try out the Adelpia yeshiva. Over Shabbos he came to Rabbi Trenk alarmed – he had seen someone smoking on Shabbos! Rabbi Trenk said that was not possible, there was no way anyone was smoking on Shabbos. But the boy insisted, saying that he had seen it, and how could he come to a place where there are boys who smoke on Shabbos?! Rabbi Trenk just nodded his head sadly and said, "Nobody smokes here on Shabbos. If you saw someone smoking, then maybe this is not the right place for you."*

What?! Come on! Did Rabbi Trenk really believe that nobody was smoking on Shabbos? Was he so blind to the flaws, to the negative behaviors, that everyone else in the world saw? Was he being willfully blind, or was



he simply pretending? And is pretending not to see, is that a way to effectively educate someone? How can you help them grow past their flaws if you refuse to see their flaws?

Let us look again at the *Tomer Devorah*:

הרביעית – שיהיו אזניו נוטות תמיד לשמע הטוב, אמנם שמע שוא או המגונה לא יכנס בהם כלל, כדרך שסוד האזנה העליונה אין שום צעקת דין ולא פגם לשון הרע נכנס שם, כך לא יאזין אלא הטובות והדברים המועילים, ושאר דברים המגבירים כעס לא יאזין אליהם כלל, וכמו שהנחש ודבורו ולשונו אינו נכנס למעלה, כך לא יכנס אליו שום דבר מגנה. והינו "לא תשא שמע שוא" (שמות כג, א) כל שכן שאר המגנה שלא יכנס לאזנו כלל, ולא תהיה קשבת אלא אל הדברים הטובים.

*The fourth: That his ears are always inclined to hear the good. Indeed, a useless or disgraceful report should not enter them at all. In the way that no yelling of judgement nor defect of evil speech enters before G-d, so should he only listen to goodnesses and beneficial things. And he should not listen to the other things that intensify anger at all. And just like the snake, his speech and his expression do not enter Above, so too, must no disgraceful thing enter to him.*

החמישית – עיניו לא יסתכל בהן כלל בשום דבר מגנה. אמנם תהייתה תמיד פקחות להשגיח ולרחם על האמללים כפי כחו, וכשיראה בצרת עני לא יעצים עיניו כלל, אלא יתבונן בדעתו עליו כפי כחו ויעורר רחמים עליו בפני שמים ובפני הבריות. ויתרחק מכל השגחה רעה, כדרך שהעין העליונה פקוחה ומסתכלת מיד אל הטוב:

*The fifth: His eyes should not gaze at any disgraceful thing at all. Indeed, they should always be open to survey and have mercy upon all the despondent, according to his ability. And when he sees the distress of a poor person, he should not shut his eyes at all. Rather, he should contemplate about him in his mind – according to his ability – and arouse mercy upon him in front of the Heavens and in front of the creatures. And he should distance himself from all observation of evil, in the way that the Highest Eye is open and gazes immediately at the good.*

Yes, Hashem – like Rabbi Trenk – acts in this “naïve” way. When it comes to people, He may “hear no evil or see no evil.”

*For the last number of years, Rabbi Trenk had a yeshiva in his home, for the same type of “out-of-the-box” student. A student joined the program who clearly had major anger issues. He could really be set off! Rabbi Trenk used to refer to him – as he referred to so many others – as “my best Talmid”.*

*One day, he was eating with the twenty other students in Mrs. Trenk’s enlarged kitchen. She would prepare and serve the meals to them in her own*

home. This young man was apparently set off by something, and exploded, literally turning over the lunch table and having its contents fly all over Mrs. Trenk's immaculate kitchen, soup, lasagna et al.

"My best Talmid", said Rabbi Trenk.

If that was not enough, days later the boy got upset with Rabbi Trenk. And he punched him. In the jaw. Several times. Rabbi Trenk just took it, turned the other cheek, as if he was leading some other religion. When it was over, Rabbi Trenk needed some time for his jaw to heal. But that young man was still his "best Talmid".

Some time later the boy left the yeshiva. Just this past year, when Rabbi Trenk fell ill, the young came to visit him, and began to apologize profusely to his beloved Rebbe for the blows he had hit him with. Rabbi Trenk was firm. "You are fine. I remember that when you left the yeshiva, we were learning this particular passage in the Gemarah. Let's continue from there...."

Now that is way too much. How do you tolerate such anger? Doesn't that boy need to learn to control himself?

Tomer Devorah (2:3):

השלישית – מצחו לא יהיה בו קשי כלל, אלא ידמה תמיד למצח הרצון שירצה את הכל אפלו שימצא בני אדם כועסים ירצם וישקיטם ברצונו הטוב ... והוא ינהלם ברצון טוב וישתף שם חכמה גדולה להשבית הכעס... וזה ימשך להיותו תמיד נח לבריות:

The third: That there not be any hardness in him at all... Even if he finds people angering him, he should appease them and quiet them with his good will ... and he should lead them with good will and use great wisdom to quiet the anger so that it not pass the limit and be destructive, God forbid. He should always be agreeable towards people.

Another story.

A former student of Rabbi Trenk was sitting shiva for a child. As the burial was in Israel, the father ended up starting shiva a day after the rest of the family and was going to have one day sitting alone. Rabbi Trenk came first thing in the morning and sat next to his student. After an hour, the student thanked his Rebbe, told him how much he appreciated the visit, and "permitted" him to leave. Rabbi Trenk would not hear of it. He was there for the day. His former student would not sit alone.

That is a powerful expression of loyalty and ongoing sensitivity to a former student.

הד' – לשארית נחלתו – הנה הקדוש ברוך הוא מתנהג עם ישראל בדרך זה לומר  
מה אעשה לישראל והם קרובי שאר בשר יש לי עממם שהם בת זוג להקדוש ברוך  
הוא וקורא לה בתי, אחותי, אמי. כדפרשו ז"ל וכתוב ישראל עם קרובו ממש קרבה  
יש לו עממם ובניו הם. והינו לשארית נחלתו לשון שאר בשר וסוף סוף הם נחלתו.  
ומה אמר, אם אענישם הרי הכאב עלי כדכתיב (ישעיה סג, ט) בכל צרתם לו צר...  
וכתיב (שפטים, ז) ותקצר נפשי בעמל ישראל לפי שאינו טובל צערם וקלונם מפני  
שהם שארית נחלתו.

*The fourth attribute - "To the remnant of His inheritance" - behold, the Holy One, blessed be He, acts with His people in this way, to say, "What can I do with Israel, as they are My relatives." As they are the spouse to the Holy One, blessed be He; and He calls them, "My daughter" and "My sister," "My Mother" - as they, may their memory be blessed, explained (Shir HaShirim Rabbah 3:11:2). And it is written (Psalms 148:14), "Israel, His close nation" - He has actual closeness with them, and they are His children.... "And what shall I say? If I punish them, behold the pain is upon Me; as it is written (Isaiah 63:9), 'In all their distress, the distress was to Him.'" ... And it is written (Judges 10:16), "and His soul could not bear the travail of Israel" - as He does not bear their pain and their disgrace, because they are "the she'erit [of] His inheritance."*

Hashem looks at us like family. We are his family. He is pained with us. We never suffer alone.

I think you are getting the idea. It may seem crazy; it may seem like something we can hardly even hope to emulate; it may seem like something out of a teacher/parent superhero movie; it may seem like something we never experienced with another human being; but it is the clear and concrete premise of Yom Kippur.

Because Yom Kippur is the day when Hashem looks at all of us and sees angels. It is the day when he looks at us and wants to keep sustaining us, no matter what we do with that gift of life. It is the day when He focuses on the good, when He allows the person to build upon the good, when He in fact only sees the good. It is the day when He responds to us with good will, no matter how often we have acted towards Him as if we are angry with Him. And He is so close to us, so committed to us. He will never let go.

The process of *Teshuva* is described as the removal of the covering from upon the heart, ומל ד' אלקיך את לבבך. The implication is clear – what is in there when you remove the lid, when you take off the coating, the כופר, or the covering, the כפורת, is something very good and pure. Most of us only see the coating, and it is not pretty. But on יום כיפורים, on this very special

day, G-d looks right through at what lies underneath. And He is so driven to see the good in us, in His beloved people.

This is an example for us to follow. It really is. Because it would seem that even if Rabbi Trenk did not have a single successful student; even if he had not spent decades of his life *Davening* his heart out, learning and teaching Torah, he would still be headed straight to the sweetest *Olam HaBa* imaginable.

We can see that from one more peek at the *Tomer Devorah*.

עד כאן הגיע שלש עשרה מדות שבהן יהיה האדם דומה אל קונו שהן מדות של רחמים עליונות, וסגלתן כמו שיהיה האדם מתנהג למטה כך יזכה לפתח לו מדה עליונה מלמעלה ממש כפי מה שיתנהג כך משפיע מלמעלה וגורם שאותה המדה תאיר בעולם.

*We have reached the thirteen traits though which a person should resemble his Creator, which are the highest traits of mercy. And their special quality is that as a person acts below, so too will he merit to open for himself the highest trait above - exactly as he acts, so will there be a flow from above. And he will cause that trait to shine in the world.*

As the Sages taught – ד' צלך – G-d is your shadow. Your shadow moves with you, it follows your lead completely and totally. We set the tone. We write the script. If we can only fill our world with this kind of positivity...:

- If we can readily tolerate the failings of those who disappoint us, G-d will readily tolerate our disappointing Him.
- If we can focus on the good in others, G-d will focus on the good in us.
- If we will build a picture of those around us built on their positive qualities, instead of harping on the negatives – G-d will do the same for us.
- If we will not even be able to hear or to see the negative in others – G-d will do the same for us.
- If we face anger with love and patience, bringing calm and peace – G-d will do the same for us.
- If we are steadfast in our commitment to each other – G-d will be steadfast in His commitment to us.

That superhero – the one who sees all the good – when He came before G-d, we know exactly what G-d saw. Only, only good.

And we can do some of that ourselves.

I want to share with you something written years ago by a member of our community, Rabbi Dovid Goldman. While Rabbi Goldman spoke about parents and children, I am taking the liberty to expand the scope of his beautiful words a bit...

*Right from the beginning, G-d already knows, apparently, that we will need to be forgiven 'once each year' for 'all our wrongdoings.' But rather than getting fed up and holding it against us, He creates a day that makes all these failures disappear, so we can start all over with renewed hope for achieving our fullest potential. We can be as happy and confident with ourselves as possible, feeling at the start of each year that everything about us is pure good, and that our Father in Heaven is as proud as can be.*

*It occurred to me recently that if we are granted a day like this from our Father in Heaven, the people in our lives deserve a day like this from us – at least once a year. Sometimes, we get a little carried away with our role of urging our children, spouse, employees, friends - to be better: to be cleaner, more responsible, more disciplined, quieter, friendlier, etc. etc. We give them the impression that they simply do one thing wrong after another and that they are just plain inadequate.*

*We tend to forget that, by nature, people inevitably will be messy, irresponsible, impetuous, loud, antisocial, etc. etc. That is exactly what we should expect will happen. And just as G-d purifies and renews us each year, expressing His understanding that failure is a part of our growth, we should grant the same opportunity to those in our lives.*

*Every Yom Kippur, perhaps we should sit down with those dear to us to deliver the message of the day: that all their errors and wrongs of the past year have been wiped away and forgotten; every last thing about them, every nook and cranny of their being, is now pure good. Their Father in Heaven and their parents and peers on Earth are as proud of them as could possibly be and a fresh new year lies ahead of them.*

*Do you know how they will feel? Certainly not that they got away with anything. They will know, instead that we believe in them and that there is absolutely nothing holding them back from being their very best. Every Yom Kippur, that is exactly how we should feel. Why shouldn't we share that feeling with others?*

Yes, we can do it once a year. Or we can be inspired by Rabbi Trenk – and by Hashem – and do it a whole lot more. Maybe it can even become the way we really relate to people, the way we effortlessly view them.

I want to conclude with one last story.

*When my wife and I had the privilege to sit with Mrs. Trenk and to hear about her wonderful husband, she was telling us all these wonderful stories and memories with a warm and big smile all over her face. She was freshly widowed, but you could not tell by looking at her. And she explained.*

*"If someone would have come to me 55 years ago and said to me: 'Leah – here is the deal. You can have a husband who will be a wonderful partner, and who will see only the good in everything you do every single day. He will never criticize you and never even think badly of you. But there is a hitch. After 55 years, you must give him up. Are you interested?'"*

*That is what I got. Hashem gave me a magnificent gift for 55 years. I am so happy I had it. How can I not smile?"*

Not everyone has been given that particular blessing. Not everyone can relate to having had that particular gift. And I can imagine that Mrs. Trenk had some challenges in her life as well. But what she was doing – what we all can do – is stop and think about the gifts of our lives. Because from Mrs. Trenk it seems that this speech, this task, is not just about looking for the positive in our children, in our students, in others. *It is about viewing life itself positively.*

The mantra of these days is the declaration of the Thirteen Attributes. Dozens of times we call out, cry out – א-ל רחום ורחון – G-d you are so merciful, so gracious, so patient, so tolerant of our flaws and failures, so committed to us...

That is G-d. One huge Rabbi Trenk story. It is so important to realize that when we speak with Him, when we live with Him. And it is so valuable to be that same way to those who speak with us, who live with us.

ואתה צדיק על כל הבא עלינו. G-d is good. He has granted us much good. He sees in us much good. He is completely committed to us.

Let us accept his embrace. Let us follow his lead.

# Uncovering True Values

*Yizkor*

Uri Zohar was the biggest thing in Israeli show business. He was an actor, director, comedian – and one day, in the 70's, he left it all. He left the fame and the fortune. He left the gorgeous house on the beach. He left the parties and all that goes along with that.

He moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, from the beach to *Rechov Panim Meiroi* in Unseldorf, and went into hiding for some twenty years, during which he simply learned Torah. He did the same thing for the next twenty years, changing only one thing: Now, as Rabbi Uri Zohar, he began to use his formidable skills as a personality and as a communicator to try to bring other Jews to Torah.

He was interviewed by Sivan Rahav Meir inside his 1.5 room apartment. Now a lively and sparkling 84-year-old, he sleeps in the same room where he spends much of the day studying Torah with a parade of *Chavrusos* (study partners). He is a learned man, a real *Talmid Chacham*. And if you ask him, he will say he is the richest man in the world. Why? Because there is nothing that he wants that he does not have.

It is an amazing thing to see. The contrast between his former glitz and glamor, wealth and plenty, and his current epic simplicity. And he genuinely does not seem to miss a thing.

There is a research psychologist named Tim Kasser. When he went to graduate school, in the late 80's, he started to read a lot about psychology and he realized something odd.

For thousands of years, philosophers had been suggesting that if you overvalue money and possessions, or if you think about life mainly in terms of how you look to other people, you will be unhappy. In other words, they were saying that the values of the world he grew up in, he lived in, were in some deep sense mistaken. It had been talked about a lot by some of the finest minds who ever lived, and he thought it might be true, but nobody had ever conducted scientific research to corroborate it.

And so, he did. And he found very consistent results. He found out that there was a direct relationship between how much people valued materialistic “things” and how unhappy they tended to be. He found that the more materialistic you become, the shorter your relationships will last

and the worse their quality will be.

Which brings us to Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur is the climax, the absolute climax, of the period of *Teshuva*. It is the 40th day from Rosh Chodesh Elul, the Tenth Day of *Teshuva*. This is it. And we are fasting. We are davening. We are spending the day like angels, engaged only in the spiritual, and not at all in the physical. This is the most non-materialistic day of the year. And it is arguably the happiest.

We know that the Torah describes the pinnacle of *Teshuva* as the uncovering of the heart, ומל ד' אלקיך את לבבך, Ramban (*Devarim* 30:6) explains this very simply: כי החמדה והתאוה ערלה ללב ומול הלב הוא שלא יחמוד ולא יתאוה. “For it is desire and lust that are the covering of the heart, and the uncovering of the heart is the removal of desire and lust.”

*Teshuva* is transcending material desire. That is why – simply put – Yom Kippur is the climax of the *Teshuva* process. Today the material cover is removed.

*Teshuva* is living for something higher, bigger and better. And today, on Yom Kippur, we get to do that. Today we pursue only meaning, only connection to Hashem.

Yom Kippur is a day when we might be very hungry, or we may be very, very full.

There is a passage in the Talmud in *Chullin* (109b) that makes the following remarkable assertion: For every forbidden pleasure in the world, there is a kosher counterpart.

אמרה ליה ילתא לרב נחמן: מכדי כל דאסר לן רחמנא, שרא לן בוותיה. אסר לן דמא, שרא לן כבדא. נדה, דם טוהר. חלב בהמה, חלב חיה. חזיר, מוחא דשיבוטא. גירותא, לישנא דכוורא. אשת איש, גרושה בחיי בעלה.

It is a logical idea, that G-d created a world for us to truly enjoy, מכל עין הגן. It follows that there cannot be an absolutely forbidden pleasure; there can only be a forbidden pathway to that pleasure.

But then we have a radically different level, a third pathway to that pleasure. Our Sages taught us about the Manna, dedicating a major discussion to the subject in *Masechet Yoma* (74b-75a), the Talmudic volume dedicated to Yom Kippur. Notably and famously, the Talmud says that in the Manna you could find any taste you imagined.

There you have it, a third pathway to the same pleasure. It can come via a forbidden pathway, by a permitted pathway, or via the heavenly Manna.



It would be clearly superficial to see this as a straight path to the same thing. After all, our Sages taught that the Manna was literally Heavenly food. It was not simply the same bread that grew from the ground, but with this batch falling from the heavens. No! The Manna was the food of angels, a sort of spiritual food. And those who ate it presumably were not busy thinking which flavor of Ben and Jerry's ice cream they were in the mood of on that fine, desert day.

No, the Manna offered something fundamentally different. Whereas the kosher food spoke to the same basic physical level of pleasure we all live on, the Manna offered a different quality of experience, in a different stratosphere, that provided no less satisfaction. That provided, in fact, far deeper satisfaction.

That is perhaps why the Manna is a topic for Masechet Yoma. Because like Yom Kippur, Manna is the art of turning from the physical to be sustained by the spiritual.

Someone shared with me an inspiring little story. As Tisha B'Av was ending in Yeshivat Har Etzion and the students were heading to the dining room to break their fast, one of them noticed their Rosh Yeshiva, HaRav Aaron Lichtenstein zt"l, seating himself in the corner of the Bais HaMedrash with a volume of the Talmud. The student approached his Rebbe, making sure everything was okay. The Rebbe assured him that he was fine. "Isn't Rebbe hungry? Doesn't Rebbe want something to eat?" Rav Lichtenstein sheepishly replied – "I haven't learnt Torah all day. I am hungry for that."

This past Tisha B'Av, I shared a beautiful thought from Rav Shimon Schwab z"l. It was so simple, but so radical. He focused on the prayer that we say when we *Bentsch Rosh Chodesh*, when we bless the new month, and we ask for *חיים של עושר וכבוד*, a life of wealth and honor. He described the simple lives of his father and grandfather, businessmen who were honest and sincere Torah Jews in Germany, and how from the perspective they gave him, he grew up understanding that this was a prayer to have what you need such that you can be the wealthy person who is satisfied with his lot, and that you should have the honor of integrity, never having brought upon yourself the shame of moral failure. It was not until he was exposed to these shores that he started to hear a different translation, one that prayed for a life of wealth and honor in what we consider its literal sense – lots of things and the approval of others. The very things that our friend Dr. Tim Kasser proved were counter to human happiness and satisfaction.

What a beautiful, simple view. Wealth and honor become satisfaction and integrity. What a healthy vantage point.

Can we be there?

The covering of the heart is desire and lust. Uncover it, and you see the truest desires, the highest aspirations in the world. Uncover it and you come to the world of Yom Kippur, to the word of purity, to the world where wealth means you have – in your tiny, simple Jerusalem apartment, rather than in your Tel Aviv beach house – everything in the world you could possibly want. Uncover it and you discover the true meaning of wealth and honor. Uncover it and you discover that all we want is that which really and truly matters.

Rav Asher Arieli is an outstanding Torah scholar who gives the largest Torah class in the world – perhaps the largest in history. His daily shiur in the Mir Yeshiva in Jerusalem has more than 800 attendees. Besides being an enormous scholar and an incredible teacher, he is such a fine person! One cannot but sense his genuine humility, his purity, his true integrity, and his outstanding care for people.

Where did he come from?

When Rav Asher was a young man of around ten years old, Israel recaptured Jerusalem in the Six Day War. Like so many of the Jews of Israel, Rav Asher's parents traveled to Jerusalem to visit the *Kosel*, the Western Wall, for the first time in two decades. For many – including Asher Arieli – it was the first time in their lives. As they were approaching the *Kosel*, Rav Asher turned to his father and asked, “Abba, what are we supposed to say here? What does one Daven for at the *Kosel*?” His father told him, “Say *Ahava Rabba*.”

*Ahava Rabba* is the blessing before the recitation of the Shema. It reads as follows:

*With a great love have You loved us, Lord, our God; with a great and superabundant compassion have You had compassion upon us. Our Father, our King - for the sake of our fathers who trusted in You and You taught them the laws of life; so too grace us and teach us. Our Father, the merciful Father, the merciful One - have mercy upon us, and put into our hearts to understand and to comprehend and to listen and to study and to teach and to keep and to do and to preserve all of the words of the study of Your Torah with love. And enlighten our eyes in Your Torah, and make our heart cling to Your commandments, and unite our hearts to love and fear Your name; and may we never be embarrassed ever.*

That is what he prayed for. That is what his father told him to pray for. A higher value. That is where a child like that comes from.

That is what a mother says when she prays for her children when lighting the Shabbos candles. זוכנו לגדל בנים ובני בנים חכמים ונבונים אוהבי ד' יראי אלקים אנשי אמת זרע קודש בד' דבקים ומאירים את העולם בתורה ובמעשים טובים ובכל מלאכת עבודת הבורא. *“Grant us the privilege to raise children and grandchildren who are wise and understanding, lovers of Hashem, G-d-fearing, people of truth, holy offspring attached to G-d who illuminate the world with Torah, good deeds, and all types of work in service of the Creator.”*

And that is what we say to our children on Erev Yom Kippur. That is what we wish for them, what we bless them with. The highest eternal values. Not material things. Just spiritual, meaningful, lasting things.

The laws of the Mourner are very similar to the laws of Yom Kippur. While mourners eat and drink, they too do not bathe, anoint, or wear shoes. This may be their way of relating to the deceased, now in another world. It seems that both the mourner and the Yom Kippur Jew imitate the angels. Both the mourner and the Yom Kippur Jew move closer to the heavens than to earth.

On Yom Kippur we attach ourselves to what really matters, to what is lasting. We are less materialistic, more connected. And so, we separate from the material. And the mourner, who now has to learn to connect to their loved one whom they can no longer touch or feel; who now has to feel the presence of and the relationship to a *Neshama*, a soul – he too must separate from the material. We connect to them, and to what they left us. And we recognize that what they left us are values, not valuables. And we pledge to carry their blessings forward, so that they live on.

So that which really matters lives on....

# פתח לנו שער – Opening the Gates

## Ne'ilah

פתח לנו שער בעת נעילת שער כי פנה יום. *“Open for us a gate, at the time that gate is closing, as the day is ending.”*

That is the prayer of *Ne'ilah*. Open the gate.

G-d instructs us to uncover, to open our hearts, ומלתם את ערלת לבבכם. But G-d also pledges to do that Himself, to open our hearts, ומל ד' אלקיך את לבבך. Whose job is it?

Ramban (*Devarim* 30:6) explained that it is our job to begin the process, and then G-d will complete it. This, explained Ramban, is what the Sages referenced when they said בא לטהר מסייעין אותו (BT Shabbos 104a).

What our Sages said was even more specific: “Open for me a small opening – like a pin hole – and I will burst it open like the entrance to a palace.”

This season is when we open ourselves up a little bit. We open ourselves up to change, we open ourselves up to Hashem. בהיותו קרוב. He is close. Spirituality, the humility of striving – it is in the air. This is when we open ourselves up a bit. We need His help to continue.

The window of opportunity is closing. We need Hashem's help to take our bit of effort and help it grow.

ע, רבש"ע, over these days for some reason I have tried to imagine how You must feel. Look at this! The Jewish people – Your beloved children – gathered, focused, thinking, and talking about how they want You to be more a part of their lives. How they want to spend more time studying Your Torah, and more effort living Your Torah. How they want to Daven, to speak to You with more presence and sincerity, and how they want to show so much more care and concern for Your other children, for their brothers and sisters. Their voices are raised in cries and in song to You. How You must feel.

But it is עת נעילת שער. Soon this will be over. You must be very sad about that. You know that the world will go back to its normal way and pattern. And we may go back to our past ways and patterns. **We don't want to.**

Hillel famously taught that the core principle of the entire Torah is ואהבת לרעך כמוך, our concern and love for our fellow man. Rashi explains

that this is not just the basis for our interpersonal obligations, for the מצוות בין אדם לחבירו, rather it is also the source of our religious obligations, בין אדם למקום. And this is because G-d is our oldest and most faithful friend, and one does not ignore such a friend. ריעך וריע אביך לא תעזוב.

As we come to the end of Yom Kippur, we want to get our foot in the door. We have tried to open our hearts, to be more feeling and more sensitive to others. To feel more ourselves. Please, please. Open the door wide. פתח לנו שער. Please, please let this be a beginning of real change.

And as we say this, we open our hearts to your pain, to what You must feel about this world when it will go back to “normal”. To the normal of forgetting You, our Creator. To the normal of a world that attacks Your children. To the normal of a world where innocent people need to worry about being randomly killed by madmen. To the normal of a world where relationships – the most precious relationships – are undermined by distraction and disloyalty, and by the demeaning of that which is precious and even sacred.

How must it feel? We can only try to imagine.

But we can – and we will – pray with all our hearts that the world be a better world for You. That You be recognized as our Creator, present and active. And that your מידות, the character that we would do so well to emulate, that would enrich our lives and those of everyone around us – that we make them the character of the world, thus giving You the world back.

We are approaching *Ne'ilah* with more open hearts than we will have for a while. Please help us to keep them open, to keep caring, about each other, and about You, רבש"ע.



ומלתם את ערלת לבבכם (דברים י:טז)

# Uncovering the HEART

ומל ה' אלקיך את לבבך ואת לבב זרעך (דברים ל:ז)

***It is my goal to "uncover my heart", to build my feelings, awareness, and sensitivities, both within my own life and in my relationships with others.***

**To accomplish this, I will:**

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***It is my goal to bring more feeling and engagement to my Davening, which is meant to be עבודה שבלב, Service of the Heart; to my faith, חובות הלבבות, the Duties of the Heart, and to my performance of Mitzvos.***

**To accomplish this, I will:**

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ימים נוראים תש"פ



בני יעקב שערי ציון

