

HOME FOR THE CHAGIM

DIVREI TORAH AND DIVREI CHIZUK
TISHREI 5781/2020



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CHOCHMAT NASHIM COMES TO YOU

Dear Friends--

As we all know too well, the past six months have been devastating, troubling, evocative, and, if nothing else, an opportunity to move forward better. The *yamim noraim* seemed a ripe opportunity to do just that. We therefore thought to offer reflections on Torah, as well as on the personal experience of these holidays - words of Torah and words of strength - that we hope will spark your own insights.

On these pages, you will find some essays that we prompted and others that were reader-submitted. All 10 are written by women. We hope the essays will bring you inspiration and comfort.

The coming year holds all of its promise before us, and, if the current year is any indication, we know we cannot predict what twists and turns await us. Chochmat Nashim looks forward, however, to continuing to work with you for the sake of a healthy Jewish community, in which Judaism is better because women are heard.

שנה טובה ומתוקה!
Shoshanna, Anne, and Rachel



The Divrei Torah and Chizuk in this holiday companion have been sponsored in honor of loved ones. Please take a moment to read their names and honor their lives.

IN HONOR OF:

- In memory of our late mother and grandmother, **Blimu Willinger** (בלומא בת ר' אהרון ע"ה), by Shosh, Rachel, Laura, Debby and Lana.
- In memory of our mother, **Donna Stiebel** (Fruma bas Tzipor Velvel), by Aliza, Moshe, Micha, and Shayna.
- In memory of **Rose Zussman z"l** and **Rita Kirshner z"l**, and in honor of **Eleanor Kirshner, Sherry Friedman, Terri Herenstein,** and **Shani Kirshner**, all of whom were and are a continuing source of inspiration to us all, by Susan Kirshner-Sheldon
- In loving memory of the strong women of our family - **Rivka Gerszberg Tunkelschwartz, Ruth Weiss Keats, Rivka Klein Berkowitz, Beatrice Berkowitz, Henrietta Klein,** and **Miriam Klein Shapiro** - who have instilled a love of family, Yiddishkeit, Klal Yisrael and Medinat Yisrael in us, so that we may continue the chain with our children, by Danielle & Boaz Berkowitz.
- In loving memory of **Ida Broll**. Dalia bat Peasach Reuven ve-Shayna was the epitome of an Ayshet Chayil. A strong, confident, caring and friendly person who always strived to make everyone comfortable. Always raising and giving tzedakah. May her beautiful neshama have an aliyah.
- In loving memory of my father, **Paul Singer**, פסח יונה בן יהודה לייב, by Yehudit Jessica Singer-Freud.
- In honor of my sister, **Hagit Rachel Leah bat Esther z"l**, who taught me the importance of strong religious female leadership. She devoted her time to chesed and was passionate for others to see the beauty of Torah, by Orna Alexander.
- In memory of **בלימל בת יחיאל ורוזי**, **מנחם שמואל בן דוד**, and **Daphne Dunn**, by Adiel Levin.
- In memory of my uncles, **Shep, Al and Saul Gerzberg**, grandmothers, **Rivka Gerzberg Tunkelschwartz** and **Ruth Keats**, and grandfathers, **Ben Tunkleschwartz** and **Irving Keats**, zichronam livracha, who taught me the meaning of love, family, standing up for justice and never being a bystander, by Shoshanna Keats Jaskoll.

THE CONNECTIVE CRY

(ROSH HASHANAH)

By Aliza Gable Lipkin

Aliza Lipkin lives Israel with her husband and six children. She is passionate about G-d, the Torah, the Jewish people, and Israel. Her mission in life is to inspire people through Torah to actualise their potential and live the best lives possible as individuals and as members of the community. She blogs for Times of Israel, is a Chochmat Nashim board member and gives classes on Torah related topics..



My father likes to reference a famous joke that is, ironically, about making references. He calls it “#7.” It’s about a group of people who love and repeat their stories so often that they have come to know them by heart. They, therefore, apply a number to each story so they can simply refer to it by its number. When they are together, it is common for one to yell out something like, “ #7!” and the rest will break out in laughter or nod their heads in acknowledgment.

Most people can relate to this type of fond repetition. I have often thought about why people so thoroughly enjoy telling the same story over and over again. I have a theory that oftentimes people experience a feeling of being lost, distant or lonely, even when in a familiar setting with family and friends. When they retell a story, they hear the sound of their own voice that comes from deep within and it connects them with the past, present, and future. This sensation is one that is familiar to the eternal soul and therefore a comfortable, soothing thing to do.

It’s a similar concept to why crying can be so cathartic. When we are pained, it is because something in the harmonious flow of our body and soul has become disconnected. We yearn deeply to realign. When we cry out from the depths of our soul, all our senses are affected. The eyes shed bitter tears that the mouth can taste. Our ears hear the shrill sound of our cry. Our noses run, and our bodies heave while the emotions reconnect the body and soul. That is why even though, at times, if nothing changes, we still feel some relief after a good cry -- because we managed to reconnect our body with the soul. This cry is familiar to the soul that cried out through the body upon entry into this world by God for future growth. This cry connects our present with the promise of the past and future.

This brings us to the commandment of hearing shofar blowing on Rosh Hashanah. The sound that emanates through the shofar is likened by our Sages to a cry. This cry comes from the untainted breath of life emanating from the one who blows the shofar. It is the sound of that pure breath given by God Himself that is emitted through the shofar and resonates with our soul. Our soul yearns to connect to its source and the cry of the shofar is exactly the cathartic moment it needs. This experience is reminiscent of not only the day of our creation when God blew into us the breath of life but also the creation of Adam HaRishon. We are thereby reminded that not only do we individually have a purpose, but we as humanity have a God-given mission.

The cry of the shofar also reminds us of the shofar blast each Jewish neshama experienced at Har Sinai with the giving of the Torah. God exhorts us in Devarim (4:12) to remember that we did not see an image, but heard His Kol (voice) so that it will be forever familiar to us and be fully recognized and accepted by all at the end of days. Rosh Hashanah is a “forshpeis” of the day we await, when we can make and maintain that connection, as it says in the Aleinu prayer: “Bayom hahu yihiye Hashem echad u shemo echad” - “That day, we will be as one (by bonding our souls together) and His name will be One.” This means that we will all understand the One true will of God by coming together and learning from one another. Until then, we will feel a sense of loneliness and isolation.

That is why Rosh Hashanah is followed by ten days of repentance. If we work on returning by getting closer and closer to our authentic selves and others, that will lead to increased clarity until we can feel redeemed and blow the shofar at the end of Yom Kippur.

The blast that began as a distant desperate cry whose familiarity was painful to the soul on Rosh Hashanah can be transformed into a sound recognized with deep joy and reconnection on Yom Kippur. Every moment of loneliness can lead us closer to God whose Eternal strength and love can nourish us through the pain until we can be redeemed in a way that will complete us. May God be with us all and help us heal the brokenness that causes pain. Shanah tovah.

CREATING MY ROSH HASHANAH AMBIANCE

By Pesha Fischer

Rabbanit Pesha Fischer has been teaching Halacha and Tanach to students of all ages for the last 18 years. For the last 14 years, she has been teaching students in gap year programs in Israel and teaching bridal classes both in Israel and abroad. She currently serves as a Special Projects Manager at Midreshet Amit. Pesha lives in Modiin with her husband Rabbi Elli Fischer and their four children.



Every year, a month before Rosh Hashanah, I start my reconnaissance and search for who is in charge of High Holiday seating in the women's section. Once I discover the woman in charge, I kindly ask to make sure that my seat is "good": Please make sure I am not too close to the door. Please make sure I am not sitting behind the "back row men" who talk throughout the tefilah. Please make sure that I am sitting near "good daveners." And magically, my friend makes this happen. She creates my Rosh Hashanah ambiance for me, because, though people associate me with being a shul-goer, I am not a "good davener." On an average year, I look to the people surrounding me and I am inspired. I think about my connection to them. I think about what they are davening for. Sometimes, I know. I daven for my friend's mother who is sick. I daven for my friend's husband to get a job. I daven for my friend's children. May they all have positive educational experiences. Through this process of connecting to the people around me, I am able to connect to my own tefilah. The sounds of everyone davening and singing together are uplifting, and I am moved by my community.

And herein lies the problem. My community, like many others, broke up in March. Yes, we have a shul. Yes, there are daily minyanim. But my sense of communal tefilah is broken. A couple of weeks ago, my ten year-old daughter and I ventured to shul on Shabbat morning. We reserved our spots ahead of time. There were four women on the women's side, and fourteen men on the men's side, in a space that usually holds upwards of 300 people. The experience was sad and not uplifting. And yet my daughter wanted to return. What inspired her? Was it the building, the fact that she saw the Sefer Torah? Or maybe it was the quiet?

This summer has been a challenging one. There was not a lot of quiet in my house. Everyone was around all the time. Keyboard, drums, guitars (electric and acoustic), and lots of people yelling, "MOM." So I started doing something unfamiliar to me: I started meditating. It was a way of creating a sense of quiet in my mind. It was way, way out of my comfort zone. But it worked. Then I started reading about Jewish meditation. I started with Aryeh Kaplan's Jewish Meditation, and noticed that I wasn't just reading it, I was learning it. There was a chapter that spoke of visualization during meditation, and one of the recommendations is to visualize the letter aleph. Rabbi Kaplan writes, "The ability to hold an image in the mind's eye is discussed at length in the Kabbalah texts dealing with meditation. Thus, Sefer Yetzirah refers to two processes in depicting the letters: engraving (chakikah) and hewing (chatzivah)." Since I am not a master meditator and even find it amazing that I can sit for ten minutes without moving, I wondered what I could take from this description. And then one night, while I was trying to fall asleep, I realized that I could visualize my community. I could engrave them in my mind. I could design who I wanted to sit next to for Rosh Hashanah. Suddenly, I didn't feel alone anymore. I could daven with whomever I wanted. I could be with my grandmother, who died a number of years ago; with my mother, may she live and be well, who will be davening alone in Jerusalem; and with any number of friends, from outside my physical community and from within. This power within my mind to create my Rosh Hashanah ambiance is not easy. It is hard to hold them in place while I say the words in my siddur, but I have started practicing. I can see them in the corner of my eye. I am surrounded by their tefilot.

Some may argue that I have misunderstood what Rosh Hashanah is about. They may say that it is not about personal tefilot, but rather about coronating the King. Some may ask, when is there even time for introspection in tefilah when there are so many words that you "have" to say. How is there even room for personal thoughts at all? All of this may have been true pre-COVID-19. While davening in a physical shul, you have to make room for self-reflection and hope that you do not take too much time and miss chazarat ha-shatz. But now we have all the time. We should not see ourselves as audience members to the chazan, but rather as players. Yes, that means that we will need to inspire ourselves. Yes, that is harder. Some of us are not good singers. We are unfamiliar with the tunes. But we have time now to prepare. Find a playlist on YouTube or Spotify. Make your own. Sing the tunes you like instead of being disappointed when the chazan chooses the "wrong tune." The blessing of being alone is the ability to create the Rosh Hashanah that you want, with the songs you want to sing and the people you want to daven with. And though that might sound sad to some, it is truly freeing.

ROSH HASHANAH: THE UNIVERSALIST HOLIDAY

By **Lucie Chaix**

Lucie Chaix works as a translator and a proofreader. She has a masters degree in legal history from the Sorbonne and is also a alumna of Midreshet Nishmat. She lives in Jerusalem.



Rosh Hashanah is mentioned in the Bible as follows: “On the first day of the seventh month, you shall hold a sacred assembly. You shall do no laborious work, and you shall mark a Day of the Blowing of the Shofar” (Numbers 19:1). The first thing to catch our attention in this verse is the mention of the number seven. Indeed, this number always signifies holiness, especially in matters of time. Shabbat, the seventh day, is holy. The seventh year, the year of Shmittah, is holy. The first day of the seventh month seems to be, based on this verse, holy.

The holiness of the seventh is expressed through us stopping creating and remembering that we are creations, created by something greater than one can imagine. On the seventh – the seventh day or the seventh month, or the seventh year – we are focused on God, the Creator of all and we remind ourselves that Rosh HaShanah is the festival of Creation, and not only the Day of Judgement.

This holiday reminds us that, on one hand, God’s creation is universal. On the other hand, His redemption and His revelation are particular to the Jewish people. This comes to show the duality existing in Judaism between the universal and the particular, demonstrated by two cycles of time: one particular, characterized through the holidays of Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot which are all three about redemption and revelation and one universalist which is about creation, about God and His relation to the world as a whole that is characterized through the holiday of Rosh Hashanah. This duality is strongly present in the prayers we say during Rosh Hashanah.

Rosh HaShanah is a celebration of the whole universe as God’s work, which is echoed in the prayer, “Hayom Harat Olam,” which we say during the Musaf service on the first day of Rosh Hashanah, where it is mentioned: “This day is the birth of the world / This day stands all the world’s creations up in judgement.”

Rosh HaShanah is about creation and humanity as a whole, and not just about the Jewish people. It’s about what it is to be a human being. In the first blessing of the Amidah on Rosh HaShanah, we say “Remember us for life,” which is a surprising request. Indeed, we usually do not include requests in the opening paragraphs of the Amidah, which are paragraphs of praise of God. Still, those requests were eventually incorporated into the prayer, on the grounds that they are collective ones and not personal ones. We are requesting on behalf of the whole humanity, and not just for our own individual selves, to be remembered for life, to be inscribed in the Book of Life.

In the fourth blessing of the Amidah, the blessing of holiness, we say “And so place the fear of You ... over all that You have made.” This blessing focuses on universality and speaks about not only the Jewish people, but of all that God has made, all God has created, all who were made, all of Creation. On Rosh HaShanah, we should think and pray not only for ourselves as Jewish individuals or only for the Jewish people, but also for all mankind, for all humanity, that it should also be blessed and prosper.

On the Day of Judgement that is Rosh HaShanah, we see God as the Creator, the Ruler of the whole universe, the God who made the whole mankind. Indeed, the whole humanity, not only the Jewish people, is judged on Rosh HaShanah. God is the God of everyone and everywhere and, as such, we should also pray for all mankind, for the whole world, especially in those challenging times that we are all currently facing, both within the Jewish people and outside of it.

If this year’s Rosh Hashanah is to be experienced differently than it was in previous years, may we find strength, both on a collective and on an individual level, and perspective through Rosh HaShanah’s prayers that articulate both a universal and particular message. May we all be blessed with health, strength, clarity, and may the whole world and the Jewish people merit to be inscribed in the Book of life and be blessed with peace.

WORKING YOUR CORE BEING: ROSH HASHANAH

By **Hannah Heller**

Hannah Fruchter Heller has taught students of all ages in both Jewish and secular studies. Most recently, she has been training medical students as a patient educator and teaching associate at Johns Hopkins University. She is the widow of the late Craig Heller and mother to Gila Golder of Memphis and Elliot Heller of NY.



I have a weakness for rich frosting on cake. I love the softness, the creaminess and sweetness. What often happens, however, is that once I eat the frosting, the cake is a huge disappointment. Often it's dry and tasteless. I start to wonder if it's worth the calories, and then I leave over most of the cake. I treasure the desserts where the whole thing tastes great, even if it means cutting down on sweets for the next several days.

The frosting, being so tasty, can often cover up the issues of mediocrity of the cake. How often do we end up covering up the essence of our being with so many distractions on the outside that we lose sight of our identity on the inside and where we are headed in life? Some people don't remember their own phone numbers and those of their friends, as these numbers are lost in the labyrinth of cell phone contacts. Several websites you log into have the captcha feature to reassure them that we are humans and not robots. What has happened to us that our default identity is that of a robot?

The month of Elul and Rosh Hashanah help to get us back in touch with our core being and our relationship with G-d. Rabbi Dovid Rosenfeld relates that on Rosh Hashanah we don't spend time asking G-d for another year of life. Most of our prayers deal with establishing G-d as King of the Universe and King over us. We focus on reinvigorating our relationship with G-d as we begin a new year. We identify with the purpose of the world -- that all humankind will ultimately recognize and devote themselves to G-d.

"We dig to a place where we've never been," remarks Charlie Harary. On Rosh Hashanah, we stand before G-d and tell our Creator who we want to be. We think about our mission. We read in the Torah about Ishmael and Hagar, after they are cast out of Avraham and Sarah's home. Although Ishmael will grow up to become evil, G-d judges him "ba-asher hu sham," where he was at the moment. Although, as humans, we will sin in the coming year, G-d judges us where we are now with our goals and our intentions to change our ways.

Shmuel Zev HaCohen notes that with the GPS, Waze, and other tracking device, we are redirected when we make a wrong turn. On Rosh Hashanah, our spiritual GPS redirects us and gets us on the right track.

"New actions lead us to new attitudes," expresses Maharat Rachel Kohl Finegold. "An external behavior can lead to an internal result. Judaism is an action-based religion. Not only do we smile as a result of being happy. If we smile more, we will become happy. Our custom of eating special foods on Rosh Hashanah (simanim) gets us in touch with character traits we want to pursue. She adds that if we want to be kinder to others this year, we should be kind on Rosh Hashanah.

Richard Camras mentions that at the time of the High Holy Days, we "search within our souls and ask ourselves if indeed G-d does dwell with us." We remember that we are created be-tzelem Elokim, in G-d's image. We want to be able to say with sincerity as we recite the Rosh Hashanah prayers that G-d's glory resides in each of us.

"Teshuvah," relates Rabbi Shmuel Herzfeld, "is not about becoming someone else, but returning to our true selves. Rosh Hashanah is the opportunity to consider who we really are. That process of thinking about and considering that question is the truest teshuvah, the truest return of all."

Is getting back in touch with our core essence scary? Of course! It's so much easier, when we get overwhelmed with life's challenges, to forget who we really are. It's hard to stay in touch with our Creator and our purpose in this world. Yet, shedding the defense mechanisms and habits that prevent us from moving forward is the message of this time of year. It sets the direction for getting us on the course in life that is right for us.

Enjoy all your delicious treats on yom tov, frosting or outer layer, as well as the cake or what's on the inside. Use the treats to strengthen your relationship with G-d and getting in touch with who you really are.

May we all be inscribed for a happy and healthy new year in which we get in touch with our true selves as we strengthen our relationship with G-d and with one another.

FEAR, EGO, AND JEALOUSY DRIVE US APART (TZOM GEDALIYAH)

By Rachel Dratch

Rachel Levitt Klein Dratch is a teacher of Torah teacher and the director of educational innovation at Prizmah, the Center for Jewish Day Schools.

This piece first appeared in The Times of Israel, as part of the Chochmat Nashim/OLP parsha initiative.



There is this famous scene in Harry Potter when Professor Snape shows us that after all these years, even though his true love has died and even though she chose another, he still loves only her. After all these years, “always”.... It is a profoundly moving scene and reminds me of the Torah readings we encounter on Rosh Hashanah: when we confront G-d, who operates according to His own plan and not necessarily ours, and then, on Tzom Gedalyah, we are forced to confront the enemy that is ourselves.

On the first day of Rosh Hashanah, we read about the birth of Isaac – the dream of Abraham and Sarah, finally realized – and we hear a hint of Sarah’s discomfort, as she says: “Anyone who hears of this will laugh.” This laughter can be joyous and celebratory, or mocking and shameful. She finally gets her dream of having a child, but at such a late age that she becomes famous as the strange old lady who had a baby. Certainly not what she had in mind when she asked for a child. And yet, she is joyous and they celebrate and she says thank you to G-d, even though this was not her plan.

On this same first day of the New Year, we read about Chana, also childless for so long. For Chana, her husband Elkanah and her sister wife, Peninah, their relationship with G-d and choice to stay engaged with Judaism, could be seen as a rebellious stand. At the time, the two sons of the high priest, Eli, were incredibly corrupt and evil. Anyone who made the pilgrimage to the Tabernacle was forced to confront the hypocrisy and pain they faced when dealing with G-d’s supposed messengers. Chana’s family makes a courageous choice to stay connected, so they keep coming to worship there four times a year. They know their leaders are immoral. Yet, they stay engaged and strong in their practice.

On the second day of Rosh Hashanah, Abraham is told to do the unbelievable – to sacrifice his son, Isaac. Both of them seem to realize what is happening when Isaac asks his father where the animal is to sacrifice and Abraham let him know that G-d would make it clear what to do. Following this vague response, the text simply states that they “walked together.” Ultimately, G-d tells Abraham that He does not ever desire human sacrifice – but this lesson was taught in a very acerbic and painful way. They return home in the shadow of the traumatic event. And yet, they still believe in and love G-d.

On the second day, we read about the prophet Jeremiah who comforts the people as they are led out in chains, following the destruction of the Temple. We could have abandoned our G-d and our religion in the face of such pain, so Jeremiah reminds us of another Jewish hero who also could have chosen an easy path, and did not. We recall our matriarch Rachel, who was promised to her love, Jacob, after he worked for seven years for the right to marry her. Jacob and Rachel suspected that her father, Laban, might try to pull a fast one on them so, the Midrash tells us, they made up secret hand signals to make sure they were not being tricked. When Laban insists that older sister Leah marry Jacob instead, the Midrash describes how Rachel shares the code with Leah to save her from shame. This singular act of self-sacrifice for another becomes the symbol for G-d’s comfort of the Jews as we are led out of Jerusalem in chains. Jeremiah tells us that Rachel, our mother, cries for us, and insists that G-d owes her one. G-d responds that her act of sacrifice will be rewarded: her children will return to their land. Rachel is indeed rewarded – as we see even in our own days – but this was not how she had planned her wedding night. Nor was it how we as a people envisioned our time in our Promised Land. The reward is very late in coming. And yet, Rachel and her future children still believe and engage with G-d.

Tzom Gedalyah forces us to confront not G-d, but ourselves. We fast because of petty jealousy that led to the murder of many and cost us Jewish autonomy in Israel for many, many years. Gedalyah was the appointed governor of the Jews following the destruction of the Temple. As he starts to lead and comfort the people, he brings a sliver of hope and begins to rebuild. It is on Rosh Hashanah, of all days, that he and the remaining Jews who survived the sack of Jerusalem are brutally murdered by Gedalyah’s cousin, no less. His cousin was angry because he was not chosen to lead. Our greatest enemy is indeed ourselves.

On this day, we confront not G-d, but each other, and face the truth of our pettiness and egos. Where Rosh Hashanah gave us the opportunity to engage with G-d, our expectations and hopes, on Tzom Gedalyah, we can engage with each other – to strive to understand each other more deeply, to connect more soundly.

Perhaps this fast day allows us to prepare even better for the opening lines of Yom Kippur, when we claim to be allowed to pray together – even with “sinners.” On this fast day, may we prepare for Yom Kippur by confronting the challenges we, ourselves, bring to the world. So that, like Professor Snape – yes, even after everything, still we love. Always.

STAYING HOME ON YOM KIPPUR

By Leslie Ginsparg Klein

Leslie Ginsparg Klein is an accomplished scholar and author. Dr. Klein received her PhD from New York University. She is an alumna of Michlalah, Stern College for Women and the Wexner Graduate Fellowship, and a recipient of the New York Jewish Week's "36 Under 36" award (2009). Dr. Klein lives in Baltimore with her husband and children.

This piece first appeared in The Lehrhaus.



When I was single, I stayed with my brother and sister-in-law for Yom Kippur every year. They lived next door to a yeshiva, and I much preferred the yeshiva-style davening to the standard synagogue service. While I typically wasn't the most fervent shul-goer, Yom Kippur was different. I was present when davening started and there when it ended.

I managed to tap into the intensity of the day: the dread of Kol Nidrei; the heartfelt pleas of vidui; the emotion-packed crescendo of the room exploding at the end of Neilah, "Hashem Hu ha-Elokim"; and the euphoria of the declaration, "Next year in Jerusalem!"

I was very comfortable in my Yom Kippur routine. Year after year, I sat in the same seat, wearing the same Steve Madden (non-leather) slides, using the same mahzor, anticipating the tune that was coming next. As I traveled the familiar and yet always emotional journey that is Yom Kippur, I had the full confidence of knowing that I was exactly where I needed to be in that moment, doing what I needed to be doing. I was in shul. Because that is what you do on Yom Kippur.

There is a level of joy in knowing that you are doing the right thing.

Only that's not what I do anymore. I haven't been to shul on Yom Kippur in years. And I am okay with that.

Back in my yeshiva-going days, when my brother and I would go back to his house during the short break, my sister-in-law would greet us at the door with a smile. Drained from the hours in shul, I could barely muster a smile in return. She, on the other hand, was relaxed and upbeat. And I, still in the intense headspace of shul, couldn't relate. To be so "chilled" on Yom Kippur seemed wrong. But now, that is me. And it is kind of nice.

These days, I don't spend hours standing in shul, feeling the heaviness of the day, the intensity, the dread. These days, I spend Yom Kippur reading storybooks and playing board games. I try to talk with my kids a little about Yom Kippur, but I end up devoting more time to building elaborate structures out of Magnatiles. When I get tired, I rest and adjudicate inter-child disputes from the comfort of my couch. I also hang out with the other moms on the block, as we have a steady stream of rotating playdates/tag team davening. With my friends' and my husband's help, somewhere along the day, I sneak in the five requisite Amidahs.

Toward the end of the day, the kids who are still awake daven the end of Neilah along with me. It's not quite as impressive as at the yeshiva, but it still gets a little loud. It may be less inspiring, but it's not just about me. It's about sharing the meaning of the day with my kids.

This year, I had different plans. My oldest daughter has reached the age where she needs to be introduced to shul davening and my husband is davening at an early "Netz" minyan. I decided to buy seats, for the first time in years, and spend a few hours in shul. But COVID-19 had other plans. And so, like many other women and men this year, I will spend Yom Kippur at home. What COVID-19 has given us is the awareness that sometimes we are not supposed to be in shul. That sometimes our true avodah, worship, is to be at home and to find meaning while being, or in being, at home.

For me, staying at home works and makes the most sense. Especially this year. Sure, there are elements of being at home on Yom Kippur that are challenging. But during the many years I spent the High Holidays single, the primary thing I davened for was to be in the stage of life that is my current stage of life. While there is certainly much to daven for today, and I could surely daven more effectively in shul, I can't feel upset. My own prayers were answered.

OH TO REPENT AND ACHIEVE FORGIVENESS (YOM KIPPUR)

By **Moria Crowley**

Moria Crowley is a tutorial lecturer at Maynooth University and post-graduate researcher at Trinity College Dublin. She is passionate about amplifying women's voices within community activism and policymaking spaces. Her research is focused on religious discourse and social justice.



In most spaces, Yom Kippur continues to be a cultural touchstone for Jews, regardless of religiosity. On this day, one asks for the atonement for one's sins. What is notable about this High Holiday among others is that it is not especially familial nor directed towards children, it is not commercialized, and as a fast day, it does not celebrate food. Overall, not an industrial holiday. Instead, it is a day to square oneself with G-d and people. On the surface, the day is one of remorse and devotion.

The basis of the holiday within the Torah can be found in Lev 16, Lev 23:26–32, and Num 29:7–11. The summary of the instructions are as follows: a high priest bathes and garments himself in holy linens, then a bull, two goats (one chosen by the Lord), and two rams were offered. The bull and the goat chosen are used to anoint the holy of holies. After this, hands are placed on the second goat (the "scapegoat"), the sins of the people are confessed, and the goat is driven away. While all this is happening, the people are directed to afflict themselves.

That is why we fast, and it is why we atone and repent. Yet, we no longer use a "scapegoat" meaning that Yom Kippur has become a more personal chag since the Second Temple. The Talmud states, "Yom Kippur atones for those who repent and does not atone for those who do not repent," further illustrating that we must take upon ourselves is actionable apology: to regret the sin, to resolve not to do it in the future, and to seek forgiveness. The word used for repentance, teshuvah, also means returning. For by doing this, we return and atone. Seeking forgiveness may at times be awkward or uncomfortable, but it should not be one of overwhelming guilt or pain. Personally, I see it as a conversation in which we are allowed to grow. Not just acknowledging our faults, but showing that we understand and can build from them. As Maimonides said, it is when it is in one's "power to repeat a violation, but separates oneself therefrom, and does not do it because of repentance..." that is true repentance.

Yet, Yom Kippur is not just about G-d; it is also about the harm we cause others. While repentance is fine for the Lord, for our fellows, it requires us to right what wrongs we have caused. It is not as simple as making a debt whole or fixing what one has broken. Instead, we should view this time as an opportunity not to settle, but to do better. It is critical to remember that forgiveness cannot be demanded, nor is it a quid pro quo. We can only ask from our family, friends, and neighbors to understand that we respect them enough to seek their forgiveness. In this time, on Yom Kippur, we have the chance to reach out with humility.

Over the past few years, it has become common and even popular to request forgiveness on social media. Public statements about vague infractions may be awkward but they also may be too easy. How often do we see statements that manage to blame those who have been hurt? Too often, people put the onus on the one who has been harmed, rather than on the actions that caused harm. For example: I'm sorry you were offended... or: To those who took offense. Unlike forgiveness, offense is freely given! In this way, one would not be obliged to forgive those who ask it. Instead, you should measure the deeds.

To return to the people we care about: that should be like the same honest conversation we conduct with G-d. By using the same three-step process of atonement with our fellows as with the Lord, we take actionable steps towards forgiveness. Take the time to call or have an honest conversation with those you have wronged or slighted. Mutual respect is our way of returning those we respect and love. As tikkun olam is more than simple charity this chag is more than penance. This year, as every year, we are blessed to do better, be better, and strive beyond the small mis-steps and gaping harm we have caused. The holiday is not an easy one, but it also should not be a negative one. Seeing Yom Kippur as more than how remorseful we feel takes ourselves out of the center of our sorry states. At the core is not unliteral forgiveness, but rather striving to make true, sincere amends. Set aside those gifts and easy statements; sit down and talk. We are so lucky to have this opportunity.

MY COMPLICATED RELATIONSHIP WITH YOM KIPPUR

By Gila Ross

Gila Ross shares short Jewish ideas from the Torah that pack a punch in the podcast, *Powerup*. She is a mum to 8 kiddos and a warm, dynamic and down to earth educator for more than 15 years. In her spare time, Gila enjoys reading, baking, running, and chocolate.



Knowing that Yom Kippur is coming fills me with a whole host of emotions, from the mundane – fear because I’m a very poor faster, to awe of the power of the day, to gratitude. Yes, gratitude, because Yom Kippur has taught me how to parent.

As parents, we all aim to raise successful human beings who will be able to fulfil their respective unique purposes. I may not know you or your child, I may not know your child’s strengths or weaknesses, their talents or their challenges, but one thing I can guarantee you: along your child’s journey to success, they will encounter failure. They will mess up; they will make bad choices. Then what? What is our job as parents when our kids mess up? How do we guide them back to success?

Yom Kippur contains the answer. Really, Yom Kippur is a gift – if we think about it, when we mess up, we should face the full consequences of our actions; there should be no alternative in a just world. But G-d, our loving Father, has given us a gift, a truly wonderful gift, the gift of teshuva – repentance. Follow the four steps of repentance, and G-d promises to grant us complete forgiveness for our failings. Under some circumstances, He will even turn those failings into successes. What a truly amazing gift!

G-d created us human, knowing that on our pathway to success, we would fail, and then gave us a gift to use those failings not to hinder, but to enhance our future success, if we follow this four-step formula. Think of it as past, present, and future & fix:

1. Feel bad about what you have done (past)
2. Stop doing the bad thing (present)
3. Make a commitment not to do it again in the future – again G-d doesn’t expect perfection, just sincerity.
4. Confess, say sorry to whomever you have hurt with your failings and to G-d (because we always weaken our relationship with G-d when we fail).

Our loving father has given us this four-step gift to take our human failings and to grow from them, and this is a gift I hope to model to my kids as well, a gift that will teach them not to fear failure, but to understand that it is human and just part of the pathway to success.

May we all merit to use this gift this Yom Kippur to transform our failings into success and to grow in our journey and relationship to G-d.

THE SUKKAH IS WHERE YOU SLEEP ON SUKKOT

By Miriam Friedman Weed

Born and raised in Baltimore, Miriam Weed attended Bais Yaakov, Johns Hopkins, and University of Maryland School of Law, eventually making aliyah in 1991. She, her husband, and her five children live in Ramat Beit Shemesh. Miriam worked in legal publishing before transitioning to her current position in compliance in the financial services sphere.



Sukkot has always been a special time for me. In addition to being a formal “zman simchateinu” (time of rejoicing), there’s a certain release of tension in the wake of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. And building the sukkah easily involves the entire family. (We discovered that our then-10-month old knew how to climb ladders when he followed his then-3-year old twin brothers up to help hand schach to their father.)

Once Sukkot begins, the mitzvah literally surrounds you. Our large sukkah porch (quite a bit larger than our living/dining room) was a main selling point when we purchased our apartment. We simply move our lives out there, along with tables, chairs, mattresses, fans, and living room couch, and go about our daily routine. It’s easy to host, and there’s less pressure to clean for guests. Most years, we have more family time, as people congregate in the sukkah, rather than splitting off into individual bedrooms. (Guidelines in early COVID-19 days achieved a similar effect, keeping people at home together more of the time.)

Sleeping in the sukkah is as close to camping as I get, and I find listening to the sounds of the neighborhood falling asleep and waking up soothing. (The only other time I became consciously aware of such background sounds was when walking to and from work around the corner from home, back in March, April, and May of this past year, when those sounds gradually disappeared and then reappeared.) I even watched a lunar eclipse from the comfort of my... mattress, a few years ago. The gap between tarp and schach was just right for me to watch the moon disappear and reappear, before I drifted back to sleep.

Growing up, we were fortunate to have a nice-sized sukkah, where meals were served and guests entertained, whatever the temperature, as long as it wasn’t raining. I don’t remember when I first became aware that women are not actually obligated to dwell in the sukkah. It simply made no difference; for me, it was a requirement. Although I don’t always say Kriyat Shema twice daily, for example, something about this mitzvah, along with taking the Arba Minim each day, was foundational to me. I chose snacks for tiyulim to exclude those made from grain, to be sure I had “snack food.” (I even made my first conscious “psak” for myself when I decided that I was comfortable to eat rice cakes outside a sukkah, even as I said mezonot on rice cakes).

When I moved into my first apartment after making aliyah, I was delighted to find that it came complete with poles and tarps for a sukkah on the porch off of my bedroom, just the size of my mattress...or four chairs...or a small table and two chairs. I stared blankly at those who asked why I bothered to build a sukkah for an apartment of women. And when I hit 50 a few years ago, the gift I requested was to expand our sukkah to the entire porch and hold an extended family birthday party there on chol hamoed.

I have been fortunate indeed to pass this on to my daughter. When she was 7 or 8, I bought each of her older brothers their own set of Arba Minim, and the merchant offered to throw in one more kosher set for 30 NIS. I hesitated. On the one hand, how ridiculous for me to purchase a fifth set for our household, for a child who would never even be obligated in the mitzvah.

And all the more so, considering how my father would recall a time when there was only one set for the entire community, and his grandmother paid the shamesh to bring it to their home on his way to shul each morning, so that the household could perform this mitzvah without having to stand in line in shul. Yet, I knew that this purchase would enhance my daughter’s yom tov, in a way that new clothing, toys, or treats would not, for the same amount of money I would happily spend for any of those.

Later that night, I thought again, and realized that part of my great-grandmother’s motivation was to ensure that she had the opportunity for the mitzvah too. Wouldn’t she have understood why I made the purchase for her great-great-granddaughter.

And then there was the time, a decade later, when it had begun raining just as my husband and I were about to go to sleep. We lugged all the mattresses into the house and went to sleep in our room. Next morning, there was my daughter, sleeping all alone in the sukkah. Apparently, it had stopped raining shortly after we headed to bed, and by the time she came home, the floor of the sukkah was dry. So she dragged a mattress out there and went to sleep - because that’s where you sleep on Sukkot.

I find I can now explain why sukkah is so important to me. True, at any given moment I am not obligated, and sometimes, due to the duties of childcare, unusual situations, or, very occasionally, my inertia, I have relied on the exemption to eat outside of a sukkah on Sukkot. But were I to go day after day, year after year, never eating in a sukkah or taking the Arba Minim, I would feel like I were not truly experiencing Sukkot (Rabbanit Henkin makes this point eloquently in this link, starting at 1:59:40: <https://www.montefioreendowment.org.uk/common/ethos/women-and-halacha/>).

And finally, we would find it impossible to transfer the focus of our home life to our sukkah if we left half the family behind.

THE JOY OF RENEWAL & REDEMPTION: SUKKOT

By Shoshanna Keats Jaskoll

Shoshanna Keats Jaskoll is a writer, speaker and cofounder of Chochmat Nashim. She lives in Israel with her family.



Whoever hasn't seen the Simchat Beit Hashoevah has never seen simchah (happiness, joy) in his life. So says the mishnah in Masechet Sukkah, chapter 5.

Hold up. Engagements, weddings, births, holidays. Jewish life is full of simchah! What on earth was going on at the Temple that warranted such a statement? What makes this ritual the penultimate experience of "simchah"?

Technically speaking, at the end of the first day of Sukkot, the men would descend from the Ezrat Yisrael, the area in the Temple where they observed the offering of the sacrifices, to the Ezrat Nashim, the larger courtyard of the Temple, where women also stood, using the famous 15 stairs where the Levites sang their songs.

Massive golden candelabras were filled with oil and spread throughout the platform. The Mishnah describes the light emanating from the Temple Mount as so intense that "there was not a courtyard in Jerusalem that was not illuminated by the light of the Beit Hashoevah." The mood intensified and before the gathered crowd, pious men danced with torches and sang songs. The Levites played instruments into the night sky and everyone partied all night long. Yes, friends, it was an all-night rave.

In the morning, two kohanim (priests) blasted trumpets, walked down the steps, through the Ezrat Nashim, and out towards the east, where they filled a golden jug with water from the Shiloah spring. Back at the Temple, this water, as well as a jug of wine, were poured out together, onto the altar.

The pouring of the water (Nisuch HaMa'yim) together with the wine pouring (Nisuch HaYayin) occurred every morning of Sukkot – this is the actual mitzvah. The partying happened only on Chol Hamoed, and yet, it is this celebration that the Mishnah defines as the ultimate simchah. How can it be that in the Temple, where just days before we poured out our hearts to God in regret and anguish, where we crowned Him the King of Kings on the most holy days of the year, a party for pouring water was considered the greatest simchah?

Let's take a look. Three things stand out as being unique to the Simchat Beit Hashoevah, things to which, I believe, we can connect, even now, when our communal lives are disrupted and uncertain in the midst of this pandemic.

COMMUNITY: Much of Jewish life is communal. But the Simchat Beit HaShoevah was the most communal of all. Men came to the women's section (a raised platform was created for the women), holy men danced, levites sang and priests blew trumpets. No sacrifices, prayers or ceremonies took place, just communal celebrating. Even those who normally did not mingle came together as one community.

So too, over the past few months, neighbors have become community. Lockdowns and bans on public gathering meant people who previously prayed in different shuls were suddenly dependent on one another. People got to know one another, respected each other's customs, and made room for each other to serve Hashem.

LIGHT: The Gemara in Sukkah comments that the light spreading from the Simchat Beit Hashoevah was so strong that a woman could use it to separate grains of wheat. While this can be taken literally, it can also be seen metaphorically. The joy and light from the Simchat Beit Hashoevah so thoroughly affected everyone that even the most mundane of mitzvot became infused with joy!

It can be very, very – very! – hard to remember joy and simchah when we are down. When we are home with children for months on end, when community members are ill or dying, when we can't see family members for fear of getting them sick, when the future of our institutions is uncertain and when we can't remember what "normal" is, joy is very far away.

The Simchat Beit Hashoevah tells us that we must grab that light, that simchah, when times are good and use it to carry us through when things are hard. No one expects us to be happy when we are in pain, but we should do our best to let the simchah that we have experienced, and our faith in Hashem, get us through the hard times.

WATER: While wine was used regularly in Temple rituals, water was only used on Sukkot. The ceremonial silver jugs used for this ritual had spouts of different sizes. This ensured that the liquids, which have different densities, would finish pouring at the same time.

Why water and wine together? Water can be seen as the Jews after Yom Kippur, pure and cleansed. Water is simple, but has infinite potential. So too people. Some are transparent like water, while others are deep and complex like wine. Some are sweet, others less so, but like the communal gathering, the water and wine come together – and are poured out together – like our hearts on Yom Kippur.

While Rosh Hashanah is the New Year, I would argue that Sukkot is our communal rebirth. After Yom Kippur's cleansing, we celebrate together, all of us, the wine and the water, with the light from the lamps illuminating Jerusalem and our souls. Together, Am Yisrael creates joy – this is the simcha to which the Mishnah refers, the simchah of togetherness in the light of Hashem.

We have no Temple, but we can be together in faith and celebration, in knowing that these rough times will not last. We can let the joy of renewal and redemption suffuse us and carry us over to next year in Jerusalem.



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