

## SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

YOM KIPPUR

SEPTEMBER 13-14, 2013

10 TISHREI 5773

**DEDICATIONS:** In memory of David Gindi HaKohen, 9 Tishrei

**WE** have the carrying of the Ten Sifrei Torah during Kal Nidrei to sell. We would like to get \$1500 each, but will sell in advance for \$1000 each. Please let David know if you would like to help us out by purchasing one. We hope to explain the entire concept of Kal Nidrei on Friday evening and why its so important to hold the Torah.

Rimonim for all the Torahs are available for \$1500.

We also of the Parnasa of Yom Kippur Day to sell at \$2600.

In order to help us with our budget for 2013 we will also be selling dedications for each of the Mezuzot

**YOM KIPPUR BABYSITTING AND ADDITIONAL ANNOUNCEMENTS TO FOLLOW**

**YOM KIPPUR – See Special section of Laws attached to the end of the newsletter**

Friday September 13 – Ereb Yom Kippur

Selihot 6:00 AM / Shahrit 7:00 AM

Minha (with Tefillin) 2:00 PM

Yom Kippur Candle Lighting 6:49 PM

Fast Begins 6:49 PM - Kal Nidre Services followed by Arbit 6:55 PM

Saturday September 14 – Yom Kippur

Shahrit 8:00 AM / Musaf 12:30 PM / Minha 4:15 PM

Ne'ilah Services 6:15 PM / Arbit 7:40 PM

Prayer Times are approximate and may change

Habdala 7:48 PM

Birkat Halebana – Blessing on the Moon

The Rabbis suggest if we can refrain from eating and melacha until 8:18 its better.

On Yom Kippur, we commemorate the 23 relatives of Zoya Yusupov who were murdered in the Bogdanovka massacre. May Hashem avenge their souls. Mrs Yusupov sponsors the break fast in their memory.

### WEEKDAY TEFILLA SCHEDULE

Shaharit Sunday 8:00, Mon-Weds at 7:00 (6:55 Mondays and Thursdays)

Daily Hebrew language class follows afterward in the Rabbi's Study

### A SUKKOT SCHEDULE WILL FOLLOW

### WEEKDAY TORAH CLASS SCHEDULE

Daily 6:45 AM class – Honest Business Practices

Monday Night Class with Rabba Yanai – 7PM

Men and Women are invited.

### SAVE THE DATE

Pizza in the Hut. Sunday after Yom Kippur.- SEPTEMBER 15

11 to 1 pm Come decorate the Sukkah, music, Arst & Crafts, friends, pizza and fun.

Long Beach Discovery Seminar - Sunday, October 3rd - 12:45 - 5:30 at the Long Beach Hotel  
More than 200,000 people have enjoyed a Discovery Seminar over the last 20 years all over the world. What is a Discovery Seminar? Based on analytical techniques used by the Mossad (the Israeli CIA), fascinating interactive discussions ensue challenging audiences to judge whether the Bible was written by people, or by a power "beyond time and space." Educational, entertaining and intellectually stimulating. We look forward to seeing you there! Please see attached flyer for details. Sponsored by The Sephardic Congregation of Long Beach and the BACH Jewish Center.

## Yom Kippur – Selected Honors

### Yom Kippur Eve

Open the Ark for Kal Nidre – Mizrahi Family for Meyer Abittan

Sefer Kal Nidre - Azizo Family for Rabbi David Bibi to hold for them

Each of the additional Torahs brought out with Sefer Kal Nidre 4-12 @ \$ 1500 ea

2. The Waldmans for Bobby Mizrahi

3. The Waldmans for Albert Yusupov

All the Rimonim for all the Torahs \$ 1500

Parnasa of evening service –LEON SUTTON

### Yom Kippur Day

Opening the Ark on Yom Kippur - Soleymanzadeh Family

Carrying The Torah Yusupov Family for Sam Shetrit

Carrying The Second Torah Bibi Family for Moses Bibi

Carry the Haftara Case Ely Altarac for Ari Waldman

Rimonim for all the Torah's Ernie Davidson

Raise the Torah Hagbah Bibi Family for Albert Yusupov

Gelila Wrap the Torah Lobell Family for Yoni Lobell

Mashlim with Kaddish said in memory of a loved one - Bobby Mizrahi in memory of his dad and of Hindys brother.

Haftara Yom Kippur Day Bibi Family for Rabbi Yosef Colish

Parnasa Yom Kippur 2600 not sold

### Yom Kippur Mincha

Opening the Ark Mincha on Yom Kippur - Soleymanzadeh Family for Meyer Abittan

Carrying The Torah Barbara Halio for Shaya

Carry the Haftara Case Mizrahi Family for Moshe Shetrit

Rimonim for the Torah and Haftara Case's Kathy Amiel for Nissim (Barry) Pinto

Raise the Torah Hagbah Lobell Family for Sammy Lobell

Gelila Wrap the Torah Lobell Family for Richard Lobell

Maftir Yona Yusupov Family for Sam Yusupov

Parnasa Yom Kippur Mincha Soleymanzadeh Family

Opening Ark Neila – Mizrahi Family for the tennis gang.

# SEPHARDIC CONGREGATION OF LONG BEACH

## MEZUZAH DEDICATIONS

Each Dedication will get a 2" square plaque inscribed by the Mezuzah

We thank the Yusupov family for providing all the Mezuzot

Dedications can be paid in 12 monthly installments between

October 2013 and September 2014

Main entrance from street & secondary main entrance at front \$5200

Main entrance to sanctuary \$ 3600

From sanctuary to Lafayette Blvd \$ 1800

From sanctuary to library RESERVED

From library to social hall \$ 1800

From social hall to storage room \$ 1000

Main entrance from social hall to kitchen \$1800

Secondary entrance from social hall to kitchen \$ 1000

Main entrance into social hall \$3600

From the kitchen to up the stairs towards the study \$1000

Side entrance from the driveway \$1000

Southern entrance to the children's room RESERVED

Northern entrance to the children's room RESERVED

Entrance to coat closet \$1000

Southern entrance to the study \$1800

Northern entrance to the study \$1000



**We thank the following members who have made  
a pledge and paid for the Ark letters**

**We ask that the other donors please pay their  
pledges so we can add their names to the list**

**Mrs. Kathryn Amiel**

**Mrs. Sarina Amiel-Gross**

**Rabbi & Mrs. David Bibi**

**Mr. & Mrs. Baruch Farbiarz**

**Ms. Lisa Gaon**

**Mr. & Mrs. Richard Lobell**

**Mr. & Mrs. Robert Mizrahi**

**Mr. David Pinto**

**Mr. & Mrs. Sam Shetrit**

**Mr. & Mrs. Richard Soleymanzadeh**

**Mr. & Mrs. Bernard Tenenbaum**

**Rabbi Michael Wagner**

**Mr. Ronen Yadgarov**

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Daily Minyan Mon – Thurs at 979 Third Avenue, 17th Floor, Artistic Frame at 4PM – Please join us! 212-289-2100

## Editors Notes

### Yom Kippur - The first day of the rest of your life

On Monday morning I looked at the scale with trepidation. Consider the times that you know something, but you really don't want to fully know. I stepped on the scale anyway and almost wished I hadn't. Between the Labor Day holiday weekend, followed by three days of Rosh Hashana and that last chunk of late August weddings, I had gained eight pounds. After having lost thirty three pounds over the previous six months, rebounding in the wrong direction was depressing.

It was easy to see where I had strayed from the path. So many people were complimenting me on my weight loss that I became over confident. What's so bad with some French fries or some pizza? And wasn't it a misvah to taste the kibbeh and lahmajin and all the other delicacies? Maybe so, but the problem is when a taste quickly becomes much more. And one dietary transgression quickly leads to another. The daily food log stopped as I really didn't want to admit even to myself that I was messing up. How foolish was I to think that I would be fine?

In a flash I was able to confess, have remorse and commit to a plan to get back on the straight and narrow. I quickly reviewed what worked and where my roadblocks were and realized it was not the parties or the holidays that were to blame. It was up to me.

I'd go back to my morning apple, then hydrating myself and focus my meals on vegetables, beans and whole grains. I'd have to write off sugar, white flour and added oils and stick to a primarily vegan diet. I needed to go back to recording everything that passed my lips and begin each day with a specific plan. I would need to prepare my meals again in advance and avoid being left to what I might find out on the road. And I had to make sure I ate enough of what was good for me. The alternative was getting

hungry and craving and quickly consuming a poor choice.

In those few seconds pondering the digital numbers floating above the floor, I set an immediate goal for sukkot. I had ten days get rid of most of what I had added back. I visualized myself succeeding and saw myself buying new clothes this fall as I would be getting closer to my eventual long term goal. I knew the system worked. I knew I had seen dramatic changes in my cholesterol and triglyceride levels. I knew my health was at stake. I even committed to add an exercise plan as one of my doctors suggested. This was the first day of the rest of my life. I would move forward. I would overcome the challenges. I would win.

Twenty four hours later I revisited the scale. Almost miraculously three of those eight added pounds washed away. Yes I know, it was probably water, but I prefer to think of it as G-d lending a helping hand to start the ball rolling again and shining a light from the end of the tunnel beckoning me to stay resolved and take baby steps forward.

We find ourselves on the cusp of Yom Kippur. These are the ten days of repentance and return. In many ways the epiphany I experienced on the scale along with the accompanying thoughts of confession, regret and resolve are what these days are all about. And it only takes a second to get back on track.

The Talmud in Kiddushin tells us that if a man proposes, "Marry me on condition that I am a tzaddik," Then even if he is fully wicked, she is married. How can that be? The Talmud replies: Perhaps thought of teshuvah, of repentance was on his mind.

Everything begins in the mind. Pesikta Rabbati, a medieval Midrash on the festivals of the year tells us how much the Sages praised hirhurei teshuvah, thoughts of repentance and a mere desire to improve.

Rav Avraham Yitzchak haKohen Kook proposed a concept of internal teshuvah, repentance played out on a stage within the heart. While Rav Kook acknowledged our obligation to speak in confession and act in correction, he emphasized that our first step is to think in contrition.

Rabbi Abittan z'sl, would explain when we discussed how the world could have been created both in the month of Tishrei and the month of Nissan that everything is created twice. It is first created in thought or potential and then created on a physical

level. He laughed when I told him about the second of the 7 habit espoused by Steven Covey, to begin with the end in mind. He quoted Pirkei Avot, "A wise man is one who is roeh et hanolad – who can visualize that which has just been conceived."

The first step in Teshuvah is to get onto the spiritual scale of life. We may be afraid to climb aboard. We often don't want to know, but without taking stock and analyzing where I am at and how I got here, I don't allow myself a starting point. And everyone needs a starting point.

Next is to determine which way I am heading. Am I going forward or backwards? Do I take two steps forward and then one back or do I do the reverse like the guy who goes on a diet and gains back more than he lost?

Where is my daily log or my nightly review? Do days just disappear as a blur into each other or do I stop at some point and ask what have I accomplished today? What could I have done that I didn't? And what did I do that I regret and should never repeat?

What are the pitfalls in my life? What things do I think I will merely taste but end up making me sick? What fences do I need to keep me away from them? What can I do to better use my time instead of simply killing it?

In Hebrew we use the word Chet for sin. But a better translation for Chet might be when a bowman's arrow misses its mark. It's when we go off course or our vehicle veers off the road. Teshubah which we refer to as repentance really means to return, to adjust my positing and get back on target, back on the road.

Every road requires a map and every road trip requires a plan and a goal. We are here and want to get there. The question is how. And the answer is one step at a time. And G-d is there to help. He is reaching down to us and all we need to do is reach up. The Rabbis teach us that during these days we can do so much more than at any other time of year. The Heavenly help is palatable. But it begins with me, in my mind and in my heart.

You want to do it. Don't be afraid to start. Don't be afraid to dream. Don't be afraid to take that step. Today is the first day of the rest of your life!

Gemar Chatimah Tovah  
Shabbat Shalom

David Bibi

### **On Yom Kippur, we commemorate the 23 relatives of Zoya Yusupov who were murdered by the Nazis in the Bogdanovka massacre. May Hashem avenge their souls. Zoya's story.**

Zoya Yusupov was born in the village of Zhuravskaya located in the Stavropol region on September 16, 1923. She lived with her parents, Avshalom and Hadassa, and her younger sister Zina. When she was six years old, Zoya's family—including her aunts and uncles—moved to the village of Blagodarnaya, where they lived and worked together. Zoya does not remember how long they lived in Blagodarnaya, but she remembers being very happy. Eventually the family moved again, this time to Bogdanovka, "I don't know what possessed them to move" exclaimed Zoya. Bogdanovka was inhabited mostly by Jews, as well as some Armenian and Russian families. Zoya's family grew accustomed to life in Bogdanovka. "We planted trees, collected cotton, and worked on the Kolkhoz (a type of collective farm) building up the community."

In August of 1940 and at the age of 17, Zoya married Mikhail Khanukayev and moved away from her family to Nalchik. On June 14, 1941, Zoya celebrated the birth to her first child, Slavik, and only eight days after this happy occasion, the war began. "My husband was an officer in reserve with a higher education and he was immediately called to active duty. I had no family in Nalchik so I took on several jobs, including cleaning houses in non-Jewish homes. My mother and father-in-law cared for Slavik." In 1943, the Nazi's occupied Nalchik.

The Nazi's were in Nalchik for three months. During the day Zoya, her son Slavik, her sister-in-law, and her three babies hid in a pit dug up by her father-in-law and other male relatives. Zoya explains that the pit was next to the house and had a ladder; it was big enough for people to sit in and had a pot for the children. Zoya's mother and father-in-law remained in the house during all hours; they only feared for the children's lives because it was said that if the children were found, they would be sent to the concentration camp Germany. Since the Nazi's didn't search during the night, everyone returned to the house. Zoya would lie in bed crying as her pillow filled with water from her tears.

"Every day the Nazi's would come looking for Jews. The only thing we had to eat was corn, flour, and water. I was scared my son would starve." The pit in which Zoya hid was covered simply with a wooden door and every time the Nazis walked by Zoya says that it was a miracle from Hashem that the children

did not cry or make any noise. "It was like they knew that they had to be quiet."

The Nazis were preparing to annihilate the Jews of Nalchik. The residents were counted and told to gather in the center of the Jewish ghetto. At the end of the third month of Nazi occupation of Nalchik, the Russian partisans started to retaliate. "They were bombing all night, we heard bombs and gun fire; we didn't know what was happening." On the next day following the bombings, Zoya heard some people jump over the fence. "Initially we were very afraid, but then we heard that they were speaking Russian and not German." She noticed that it was her uncle Haskeel Pinkhasov along with five or six other partisans. "I threw myself at him, hugging him and all the friends. They came to make sure that we were alive. They left immediately and went to every house looking for people and making sure everyone was still at home." Zoya soon found out that Haskeel and the people from the partisan unit pushed the Nazis out of Nalchik.

Zoya waited for her husband to return home. Later in that same year she received an official letter stating that Mikhail had perished in war.

Zoya frequently worried that she had not heard from her family in Bogdanovka. On August 22, 1942 the Nazi's occupied Bogdanovka. They began robbing the cattle, food, and personal items from the Jewish houses. They also wrote a rule that citizens could not resist or talk with the neighbors and implemented a 10pm curfew. Eventually, they recorded the names of all the Jews in the village.

Around the time of Yom Kippur in September of 1943, the Nazi's gathered the residents at the local school to relocate them. They were told to bring their valuables and were prohibited from taking heavy personal objects. They were seated on trucks and transported to an abandoned well that was about 80 feet deep. The Nazis gave everyone a shovel and demanded that they expand the width of the well. People were told that this well would be used by the Nazis to store weapons and ammunition in preparation to fight the Russian army. Before the citizens could finish working on the well, the Nazis opened fire. Most of the Jews were wounded and alive when the Nazis buried them in the well.

Zoya lost 23 relatives in the Bogdanovka massacre including her parents, sister, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Only one child managed to escape.

Following the war, Zoya just managed to get by. She worked as a ticket taker on the train and sold ice cream. In 1948 when Slavik was 7 years old, Zoya

moved away from her elderly in-laws. She had a difficult time dealing with the loss of her husband and believed that Mikhail would return from war; she waited for him for 14 years. In 1954 when Slavik was 13 years old, Zoya married Simcha Yusupov. Mikhail's mother encouraged this union because she wanted her grandson to have a father and siblings to grow up with. In the years that followed, Zoya had four more children: Alex, Anna, Sofiya, and Albert Yusupov. Zoya stayed at home and raised her five children while Simcha worked to support his family.

Zoya currently lives in Long Beach, NY. She has 12 grandchildren and 12 great-grandchildren.

### **TORAH READINGS FOR YOM KIPPUR – The OU**

On the morning of Yom Kippur, two Torah Scrolls are removed from the Aron HaKodesh (Holy Ark).

The Torah Reading is from Vayikrah (Leviticus) Chapter 16, verse 1-34. This portion discusses the instructions to Moshe and Aharon concerning the procedure for the priestly service on Yom Kippur, which would enable them to achieve atonement for Israel. The portion then details the laws of Yom Kippur. There are six aliyahs (a number used only on Yom Kippur) and a Maftir. When Yom Kippur falls out on Shabbos, there are 7.

The Maftir is read from a second Torah Scroll and is from BaMidbar (Numbers) Chapter 29, verse 7-11. The maftir relates the Sacrificial Service for Yom Kippur.

Following the Maftir, the Haftorah is read. The Haftorah is from Yeshayahu (Isaiah) Chapter 57: verse 14 until Chapter 58, verse 14. Isaiah urges the Jewish People to return to Hashem through good deeds, kindness and sincere Teshuvah.

In the afternoon, during Mincha, one Torah Scroll is removed from the Aron HaKodesh.

The Torah reading is from Vayikrah (Leviticus) Chapter 18, verse 1-30. The portion deals with forbidden sexual relationships. Though the exact reason for reading this section now is not entirely clear, here are some possible reasons. 1) They are read now because everyone is in shul. 2) It is as if to say, "Though right now you are on a lofty spiritual level on Yom Kippur, don't think you cannot drop down in a second to the worst abominations. 3) The cornerstone of morality is self-control over animal sensuality (Hirsch)

Following the three aliyahs, the Haftorah is read. The Haftorah is the book of Yona (Jonah). Though everyone knows that a large fish swallowed Yona, the message of Yona is actually a timeless lesson in the power of Teshuva and G-d's desire to help man rather than punish him.

### EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

"Blessed are You Hashem, the King who forgives and pardons our sins and the sins of His people."  
(Amidah of Yom Kippur)

How can we say this berachah with conviction? Can we be sure that Hashem will definitely forgive us? Rabbi D. Staum quotes the Dubner Maggid with a great parable. It's about a young boy who could not convince his father to give him a cookie. The clever youth climbed onto the counter next to the cookie jar and loudly recited the berachah...Boreh mineh mezonot." The father did not want his son to have recited a berachah in vain, so he quickly gave a cookie to his jubilant son.

So it is with us. We may not be deserving of forgiveness, but we know Hashem loves us like a father and we are confident that He will not want us to have recited the blessing in vain.

May I take this opportunity to bless, from the bottom of my heart, every member of our shul with a beautiful year of life, health, happiness, and good livelihood. And may all of our children who are eligible find their partner in marriage this year, Amen.  
Rabbi Reuven Semah

Although Yom Kippur atones for a good portion of our sins, those transgressions between man and his fellow man are not forgiven unless we ask our friend to forgive us first. This should be a priority on everyone's list as we come to Yom Kippur, because we want to achieve the best atonement possible and we need to be forgiven by those we may have wronged. It is a proper custom to ask all of our friends' forgiveness before the holiday and to say we forgive them when asked by them.. It is especially important to kiss our parents' hands on Ereb Kippur and ask their forgiveness and, if they are not near us, to do it on the telephone. In addition, many synagogues have instituted that before Kal Nidre it is announced that everyone should forgive each other and everyone should say that they have forgiven. This creates a tremendous force of atonement in Heaven and will affect a Divine Pardon by Hashem to all His people. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

### Rabbi Wein

Yom Kippur is not only the day of holiness and forgiveness of sin – it is also the great day of hope and optimism. To a great extent each of us is born anew on that day. Each one of us has an opportunity to reexamine ourselves. Though we spend much of our prayer time admitting our sins, failures and shortcomings, we do so confident that these errors will be erased in God's compassion for His creatures. We confess to the entire litany of sins listed in our prayers so that we will be cleansed of all possible guilt and allowed to move forward unburdened by past impediments.

Long ago when I was an attorney in Chicago I knew a colleague who was a specialist in guiding people through the process of voluntary bankruptcy. He told me that most of his clients, on a consistent basis, were guilty of not listing all of their debts and liabilities in their original application for bankruptcy protection. They either forgot that liability, or for some strange but prevalent psychological reason, were too embarrassed to list that matter in their bankruptcy petition. It is one thing to default on a bank loan. It is another matter to do so to those who are near and dear to you.

When we ask for Divine forgiveness on the holiest day of the year, the litany of sins and shortcomings, which are the core of the Yom Kippur prayer service, comes to correct this psychological and emotional deficiency. We confess to every sin possible, because humans are able, if not even prone, to commit every sin possible. Our memories are selective and often times faulty.

Embarrassment before our Creator is a human trait inherited from Adam who displayed it in his confrontation with God at the dawn of human civilization. Therefore the complete listing of all possible sins is a necessary component to obtain forgiveness on Yom Kippur.

As mentioned above, Yom Kippur is a singular day of opportunity. Freed from the mundane tasks that encompass our existence all year long, we have time to think about the things in life that ultimately matter – family, community, tradition and our legacy to those that come after us. We honestly confront our mortality and human state of being.

We also think about our souls, that we have oftentimes ignored and neglected because of the pressures of our daily pursuits. We can recharge that reservoir of Jewish pride that lies within each of us – how special we are as individuals and as a collective



nation. Identifying as a Jew, and understanding the demands and privileges that this identity bestows, gives one a true sense of importance and purpose in life.

The alienated, the scoffers, the confused and the ignorant will find little comfort for themselves on this holy day. But for those who seek to know themselves and thereby glimpse their Creator and their own immortality, the day of Yom Kippur is one of unmatched opportunity and wrenching satisfaction. It is akin to the renewal of an old and cherished friendship and of finding a long-lost object of emotional value. Our inner essence, uncovered by the holiness of the day of Yom Kippur is that long-lost valuable object; it is our old and best friend.

The physical deprivations that Yom Kippur demands of us are a reminder that nothing in life that is important and lasting can be achieved without sacrifice and some form of deprivation. Judaism does not preach a life of asceticism. The Torah looks askance at those who willfully deprive themselves of the permitted pleasures of life. The rabbis taught us that the rewards and benefits of life are commensurate to the effort and sacrifice that we invest in achieving these goals.

There is no free lunch in the physical and spiritual worlds that we inhabit. The mandated deprivations of our bodily wants on Yom Kippur serve to remind us of this truism. In the prayers of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur we confess that we risk everything in order to place food on our table. Yom Kippur and its bodily restraints teach us that we must also risk discomfort in order to attain any form of spiritual level and composure.

The absence of the chomping sound of eating, the gurgle of drinking and the clicking sound of sturdy leather shoes, allows us to hear the still small voice within us, the sound which our soul generates. It is that voice that elevates us and puts us in touch with our Creator. And that is what makes the day of Yom Kippur the supreme day of human greatness and opportunity – the holiest day of the year.

### **Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks**

I vividly remember the surprise and delight I had when I first read Jane Austen's Emma. It was the first time I have read a novel in which you see a character changing over time. Emma is an intelligent young woman who believes she understands other people better than they do. So she sets about arranging their lives – she is an English shadchan – with disastrous

consequences, because not only does she not understand others; she does not even understand herself. By the end of the novel, though, she is a different person: older, wiser and humbler. Of course, since this is a Jane Austen story, it ends happily ever after.

In the more than 40 years that have passed since I read the book, one question has fascinated me. Where did Western civilisation get the idea that people can change? It is not an obvious idea. Many great cultures have simply not thought in these terms. The Greeks, for instance, believed that we are what we are, and we cannot change what we are. They believed that character is destiny, and the character itself is something we are born with, although it may take great courage to realise our potential. Heroes are born, not made. Plato believed that some human beings were gold, others silver, and others bronze. Aristotle believed that some are born to rule, and others to be ruled. Before the birth of Oedipus, his fate and that of his father, Laius, have already been foretold by the Delphic Oracle, and nothing they can do will avert it.

This is precisely the opposite of the key sentence we say on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, that “Teshuvah, tefillah and tzedakah avert the evil decree.” That is what happened to the inhabitants of Nineveh in the story we read at Mincha on Yom Kippur. There was a decree: “In forty days Nineveh will be destroyed.” But the people of Nineveh repent, and the decree is cancelled. There is no fate that is final, no diagnosis without a second opinion – half of Jewish jokes are based on this idea.

The more I studied and researched, the more I realised that Judaism was the first system in the world to develop a clear sense of human free will. As Isaac Bashevis Singer wittily put it, “We have to be free; we have no choice.”

This is the idea at the heart of teshuvah. It is not just confession, not just saying Al chet shechatanu. It is not just remorse: Ashamnu. It is the determination to change, the decision that I am going to learn from my mistakes, that I am going to act differently in future, that I determined to become a different kind of person.

To paraphrase Rabbi Soloveitchik, to be a Jew is to be creative, and our greatest creation is our self. As a result, more than 3000 years before Jane Austen, we see in Torah and in Tanakh, a process in which people change.

To take an obvious example: Moshe Rabbenu. We see him at the start of his mission as a man who cannot speak easily or fluently. "I am not a man of words." "I am slow of speech and tongue." "I have uncircumcised lips." But by the end he is the most eloquent and visionary of all the prophets. Moses changed.

One of the most fascinating contrasts is between two people who were often thought to resemble one another, indeed were sometimes identified as the same person in two incarnations: Pinchas and Elijah. Both were zealots. But Pinchas changed. God gave him a covenant of peace and he became a man of peace. We see him in later life (in Joshua 22) leading a peace negotiation between the rest of the Israelites and the tribes of Reuben and Gad who had settled on the far side of the Jordan, a mission successfully accomplished.

Elijah was no less a zealot than Pinchas. Yet there is a remarkable scene some time after his great confrontation with the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel. He is at Mount Horeb. God asks him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" Elijah replies, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty." God then sends a whirlwind, shaking mountain and shattering rocks, but God was not in the wind. Then God sends an earthquake, but God was not in the earthquake. Then God sends fire, but God was not in the fire. Then God speaks in a kol demamah dakah, a still small voice. He asks Elijah the same question again, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" and Elijah replies in exactly the same words as he had done before: "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty." At that point God tells Elijah to appoint Elisha as his successor (1 Kings 19).

Elijah has not changed. He has not understood that God now wants him to exercise a different kind of leadership, defending Israel not criticising it (Rashi). He is asking Elijah to make a similar transformation to the one Pinchas made when he became a man of peace, but Elijah, unlike Pinchas, did not change. Even his words do not change, despite the momentous vision. He had become too holy for this world, so God took him to heaven in a chariot of fire.

It was Judaism, through the concept of teshuvah, that brought into the world the idea that we can change. We are not predestined to continue to be what we are. Even today, this remains a radical idea. Many biologists and neuroscientists believe that our character and actions are wholly determined by our genes, our DNA. Choice, character change, and free will, are – they say – illusions.

They are wrong. One of the great discoveries of recent years has been the scientific demonstration of the plasticity of the brain. The most dramatic example of this is the case of Jill Bolte Taylor. In 1996, aged 37, she suffered a massive stroke that completely destroyed the functioning of the left hemisphere of her brain. She couldn't walk, talk, read, write, or even recall the details of her life. But she was very unusual in one respect. She was a Harvard neuroscientist. As a result, she was able to realise precisely what had happened to her.

For eight years she worked every day, together with her mother, to exercise her brain. By the end, she had recovered all her faculties, using her right hemisphere to develop the skills normally exercised by the left brain. You can read her story in her book, *My Stroke of Insight*, or see her deliver a TED lecture on the subject. Taylor is only the most dramatic example of what is becoming clearer each year: that by an effort of will, we can change not just our behaviour, not just our emotions, nor even just our character, but the very structure and architecture of our brain. Rarely was there a more dramatic scientific vindication of the great Jewish insight, that we can change.

That is the challenge of teshuvah.

There are two kinds of problem in life: technical and adaptive. When you face the first, you go to an expert for the solution. You are feeling ill, you go to the doctor, he diagnoses the illness, and prescribes a pill. That is a technical problem. The second kind is where we ourselves are the problem. We go to the doctor, he listens carefully, does various tests, and then says: "I can prescribe a pill, but in the long-term, it is not going to help. You are overweight, underexercised and overstressed. If you don't change your lifestyle, all the pills in the world will not help." That is an adaptive problem.

Adaptive problems call for teshuvah, and teshuvah itself is premised on the proposition that we can change. All too often we tell ourselves we can't. We are too old, too set in our ways. It's too much trouble. When we do that, we deprive ourselves of God's greatest gift to us: the ability to change. This was one of Judaism's greatest gifts to Western civilisation.

It is also God's call to us on Yom Kippur. This is the time when we ask ourselves where have we gone wrong? Where have we failed? When we tell ourselves the answer, that is when we need the courage to change. If we believe we can't, we won't. If we believe we can, we may.

The great question Yom Kippur poses to us is: Will we grow in our Judaism, our emotional maturity, our knowledge, our sensitivity, or will we stay what we were? Never believe we can't be different, greater, more confident, more generous, more understanding and forgiving than we were.

May this year be the start of a new life for each of us. Let us have the courage to grow.

### **Rabbi Frand on Yom Kippur Thoughts About Prayer Before Yom Kippur**

We believe with complete faith that all which will transpire during the coming year – both on a personal level and on a national level – is determined during the period of the Ten Days of Repentance. We are all familiar with the concept "Seek out G-d when He is to be found, call out to Him when he is near" [Yeshaya 55:6]. This is the time of year when the Master of the World is particularly close and therefore the normal obstacles that might exist to making our prayers effective are removed so that our sincere prayers to Him will certainly be heard.

I always tell myself -- and everyone who listens to me -- that we must take advantage of this time of year, like no other ten day period on the calendar. Particularly, regarding prayer and asking for all that we need, this is the time to do it. No matter what your practice is the rest of the year in terms of minyan attendance or in terms of focus (kavanah) during davening or in terms of how quick you daven, that should all be set aside this time of year where each Shachris, Mincha, and Maariv is a unique opportunity for communication with Heaven in a way that is unique to this time of year.

We cannot waste these golden opportunities. Therefore, I think it is worthwhile to spend a few minutes talking about the concept of prayer. Normally, I say over a "dvar Torah", a Torah thought, an insight and then I end with a story. Tonight I am going to begin with a true story that I think is amazing and which has a very important lesson for us.

The story was told and written up by Rabbi Aryeh Lev Ginsberg, a Rav in New York. Rabbi Ginsberg had a congregant, who had a son, who went to learn in Eretz Yisrael. The son became very attached to Eretz Yisrael and decided to enroll in a Hesder Yeshiva which combines Torah study with military service. He became a member of the Israeli army and in fact rose to a position of leadership in the Israeli Defense Forces. In the summer of 2005, the Israeli government decided to give back Gaza to the Arabs. The army had to forcibly remove the Jewish settlers

who refused to voluntarily abandon their settlements. The American student was very distraught about the assignment. He felt it was the wrong thing to do; but as a soldier he followed orders and participated in the forced evacuation.

His unit came to a certain settlement in Gaza. It was his job to see to it that the settlers boarded the buses to be evacuated. He worked with the Rabbi of the settlement. All the settlers gathered in the town's synagogue. The Rabbi spoke, the soldier spoke, they all cried and finally they all filed out of the shul and boarded the bus. After everyone had evacuated the building, this soldier took out a siddur from his backpack. He knelt down on the ground, dug a hole, and buried his siddur. The Rav of the settlement asked him why he did that. The soldier replied that maybe a year from now or 5 years from now or 50 years from now, we will come back to this place, people will rebuild here and maybe they will find this siddur and will realize that we left our hearts and prayers behind in this place.

Fast forward 11 months. It is now the summer of 2006. Gilaad Shalit was captured by Hamas militants in Gaza. Israel decided to reinvade Gaza in an attempt to find him. The unit of this American soldier was sent back into Gaza to set up a camp as a base of operations. They entered Gaza under the cover of darkness. They did not know exactly where they were, but they stopped at a certain deserted place to set up camp. The next morning, the soldier looked around. He was totally disoriented. He did not recognize anything. All he saw was rubble from the houses and the greenhouses and the buildings that were destroyed. He did not really know where he was. He got a feeling that he should look for his siddur. He knelt down on the ground and started digging. Lo and behold, he found the siddur. There were overwhelming odds against this happening and he was literally shaken by his find. He called his father in America and told him the amazing story and told him to ask his Rabbi to interpret the significance of this find for him.

Rabbi Ginsberg himself was astounded, and could not bring himself to interpret the meaning of the story. However, he arranged a meeting between the soldier and Rav Chaim Kanievsky to allow the soldier to hear the opinion of a great and holy man in Israel regarding the meaning of this incident.

Rav Chaim Kanievsky asked him, "What did you do when you knew you were going to need to evict the settlers from Gaza?" The soldier replied, "I went to my commanding officer and I went up the chain of command trying to convince everyone that it was a

mistake and that we should not go ahead with the operation." "What else did you do?" persisted Rav Kanievsky. The soldier added that he prayed to the Master of the World that it should not happen and that He should please show Mercy.

Rav Chaim then asked, "So when it happened, and you had to evict them, so what did you do then?" The soldier responded, "At that point I stopped davening for it to not happen." Rav Chaim Kanievsky said, the Master of the World is telling you: Never stop praying for something! This is why you found your siddur. You buried the siddur because you felt it was futile to daven anymore. G-d caused you to find it so that you will realize that it is never too late to daven for something! "All is lost?" G-d tells you: "No. All is not lost. Get the siddur and start davening again."

This is the lesson we must bear in mind as we approach the High Holidays. "Hope to G-d. Strengthen your heart. And hope to G-d." [Tehillim 27:14]. The Talmud interprets this pasuk to mean that if a person prays and sees that his prayers are not answered, he should pray further. [Brachos 32b] This is one of the great mistakes we make. We think we pray for so many sick individuals who do not get better. We pray for so many miserable situations that do not improve. We pray for so many things and our prayers are apparently not answered. This is a mistake. No prayer ever goes "wasted". It may not help us for a particular time or a particular place but all prayers go up to heaven and at some time and in some place they have an effect. The Talmud says that prayer is one of the things that stand at the peak of the world, yet people treat it lightly [Brachos 6b]. The Baal Shem Tov interprets the reason people treat it lightly is precisely because its effects take place "at the peak of the world" (b'rumo shel olam) and so it may take centuries for the effects to be noticed here on earth. We may pray for ourselves and maybe the prayer will take hold, but only affect a great-great grandchild of ours. We do not see the effects, so sometimes we treat it lightly.

We live in the computer age where we can type our question into a search engine and get an instant answer. We cannot relate to the concept of a prayer that will take three centuries to be answered. We are not used to that and we treat it lightly.

This is the lesson of the story with the Siddur: Do not stop davening. Finally, there is one more thing we must bear in mind. As important and as crucial as these days are to us personally, we dare not forget about the needs of Klal Yisrael and the Jewish people. When we hear leaders of powerful countries, who may one day have nuclear weapons talk about

annihilating Israel off the face of the earth, we have to cry bitter and frightened tears to beg for Mercy that our enemies not achieve their aims.

There is a famous pasuk that we read in the HafTorah on Shabbos when Rosh Chodesh comes out on Sunday. "...And Saul said to Yonasan his son, 'Why does the son of Yishai (Dovid) not come – neither yesterday nor today – to the bread (el haLachem)" [Shmuel I 20:27]. Homiletically, this pasuk is interpreted: "Why does the son of Yisahi (the Messiah) not come – neither yesterday nor today?" We keep asking for Moshiach year after year and he does not come. Why not? The answer is "el haLechem" – because we keep asking for bread in our prayers, instead of asking for Moshiach. We are interested in making a living. That is the focus of our prayers. So our prayers are answered and we make a living. However, we do not sufficiently pray for the coming of Moshiach. Were we to do so, those prayers would have been answered by now as well.

We need to pray, not just for our personal needs, but we need a macro perspective as well. We must keep in mind that the Jewish people are in danger. It does not take imagination on our part to wonder "what might go wrong?", "what might happen to the Jewish people?" Just read the paper. Listen to the news. Look at what they are saying in Iran and in the other Arab countries. If we are only interested in "el haLechem" [our needs of earning bread], this is the reason that "the son of Yishai" has not yet come.

## AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

### Preparing for Yom Kippur TEN STEPS TO GREATNESS

STEP ONE: Spend at least 30 seconds each day thinking about the WORLD TO COME - Olam Haba - and that we are in this world only as a preparation for the World to Come. This is the purpose of life.

STEP TWO: Spend a few seconds each day in a private place and say to Hashem, "I love you, Hashem." You will be fulfilling a positive commandment from the Torah. This will kindle a fire in your heart and will have a powerful effect on your character. Your exteriority bestirs your interiority. The Almighty is listening. He loves you much more than you love Him.

STEP THREE: Every day do one act of kindness that no one knows about, in secrecy. Have intention beforehand that you are doing this in order to fulfill your program to greatness. The practice of doing acts of kindness - Gemilut Hasadim - is one of the three most important

functions in the world. Examples: If your wife is not in the kitchen, clean a few dishes or straighten up for her without her knowing. If you should see something potentially dangerous on the sidewalk, clear it off to the side so no one will get hurt.

STEP FOUR: Encourage someone every day. "Hashem encourages the humble." Have in mind you are doing it because of the program. Anonymous letters of kindness can do a great deal of good to encourage people.

STEP FIVE: Spend one minute a day thinking about what happened yesterday. "Let us search out our ways and investigate." Everyone should have his mind on what he is doing - by reviewing yesterday's actions daily.

STEP SIX: Make all your actions for the purpose of Heaven. Say it once a day. Example: "I am doing this in order to be more aware of Hashem."

STEP SEVEN: Be aware of the principle - "Man was created in the image of Hashem." Every human face is a reflection of Hashem. Your face is like a screen and your soul like a projector which projects on your face the glory of the human soul which has in it the greatness of Hashem. Once a day pick a face and think "I am seeing the image of Hashem." You will begin to understand the endless nobility of a face.

STEP EIGHT: Once a day give a person a full smile. Just as Hashem shines on us, we should smile on others. Smile because the Hashem wants you to, even though you really don't want to. When you smile have intentions that you are doing it for the purpose of coming closer to Hashem through the Ten Steps To Greatness.

STEP NINE: "Hashem clothes the naked." Clothing is a testament to the nobility of man. Man is unique - has free will, has a soul, made in the image of Hashem. Even Angels are beneath man in greatness. To demonstrate the superiority of mankind, we must be clothed. Spend 30 seconds in the morning thinking about our garments: what a gift they are from Hashem.

STEP TEN: Spend time each day thinking about the olden Jerusalem during the time of the Temple. Every day sit on the floor (before going to sleep), spend one second on the floor and mourn for the destruction of Jerusalem. Think "If I should forget you Jerusalem, let my right arm forget how to function" (Psalms 137:5).

"The wise man seizes the opportunity to do Mitzvot" (King Solomon). The lazy person says - someday I'll do it. If you start this program, after 30 days you will be tired. So, wait six months until you start again. Do another 30 days then wait five months and so on. After a while you might do it all the time. If you do it even one day you are extraordinary.

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