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High Holidays Companion





Rosh Hashanah: Giving God the Crown of Just Kingship

Rabbi Megan GoldMarche

There are two moments in the Rosh Hashanah services that remind me what we are celebrating and praying for on this holy day.

The first moment comes early; if you arrive late you are likely to miss it. The words are ones we say as part of Shabbat and holiday davening, but they take on an entirely new hue when serving as the introduction to the main part of the *Shacharit* service on the High Holidays.

The King Who sits on a throne [that is] exalted and uplifted. God Who dwells in eternity, exalted and holy is God's Name. And it is written: "Joyfully exult in God, [you] righteous ones, for the upright, praise is fitting."

הַמֶּלֶךְ יוֹשֵׁב עַל כִּסֵּא רָם וְנִשְׂא:
שׁוֹכֵן עַד מְרוֹם וְקְדוֹשׁ שְׁמוֹ.
וְכָתוּב רַנְּנוּ צְדִיקִים בַּיהוָה.
לְיִשְׂרָאֵל גְּאוּהַ תְּהִלָּה:

In the traditional Ashkenazi cantorial tradition, the leader holds the first note — the **Ha** in *Hamelech* — for many counts. This creates a powerful, suspenseful entrance that emphasizes God's kingship. I close my eyes and picture a just ruler, faceless and bodyless, before me: ready to bestow love and judgment as I begin my day of reflection and prayer.

The second moment comes a couple of hours later, when the room is full, and we have started to count down the number of pages left until lunch. I was in Jerusalem studying at Pardes in 2008 the first time I remember hearing the *Va'ye'etayu* prayer. Coming after the somber tunes of *Unetaneh Tokef* and the spiritual severity of the *kedushah*, suddenly the room broke out in singing and dancing and I could feel the joy and energy pulsing through the congregation. I never wanted it to end. The chorus declares: "and they will give unto You the crown of kingship." I chased the feeling it engendered the rest of the day and, in many ways, the rest of the year.

This prayer became a highlight of the *Yamim Noraim* for me, and I made sure it was included in all services I organized. But it is only in recent years that I have found myself leading *Musaf* in a community that does not have a tradition of energetic singing and dancing during this prayer, and realized I needed to articulate for them and myself the power of this moment in the service.



And all shall come forth to serve You and bless Your glorious Name, and throughout the isles they shall declare Your righteousness. And peoples will seek You, who knew You not before; and they will praise You, those who live in every part of the earth, and they will say, always, "Magnified be Adonai." And they will offer to You their sacrifices, and they will abandon their idols, and they will be humiliated with their graven images, and they will turn with unanimous accord to worship You. And they will fear You, as long as the sun is upon them, those who seek Your Presence. And they will realize the power of Your kingship, and they will teach those who have gone astray understanding [of God]. And they will speak of Your might, and they will uplift You, causing You to be uplifted above all, and they will fervently beseech Your Presence and crown You with a crown of glory. And the mountains will burst out in joyous song, and the isles will exult in Your kingship, and they will accept the yoke of Your kingdom upon themselves, and they will exalt You in the assembly of peoples. Those from far-off lands will hear of this and they will come, and they will give unto You the crown of kingship.

וַיֵּאָתִיּוּ כָל לְעִבְדֶּךָ.
וַיְבָרְכוּ שֵׁם כְּבוֹדֶךָ.
וַיְגִידוּ בְּאֵיִם צִדְקָךָ.
וַיְדַרְשׁוּךָ עַמִּים לֹא יָדְעוּךָ.
וַיְהַלְלוּךָ כָּל אֶפְסֵי אֶרֶץ.
וַיֹּאמְרוּ תַמִּיד יִגְדַּל יְהוָה.
וַיַּזְבְּחוּ לָךְ אֶת זִבְחֵיהֶם.
וַיַּחֲפְרוּ עִם פְּסִילֵיהֶם.
וַיִּטּוּ שִׁכְמָם אֶחָד לְעִבְדֶּךָ.
וַיִּירָאוּךָ עִם שִׁמְשׁ מִבְּקָשֵׁי פְנֶיךָ.
וַיְכִירוּ כֹחַ מַלְכוּתֶךָ.
וַיִּלְמְדוּ תוֹעִים בִּינָה.
וַיִּמְלְלוּ אֶת גְּבוּרָתְךָ.
וַיִּנְשָׂאוּךָ מִתְנַשָּׂא לְכָל לְרָאשׁ.
וַיִּסְלְדוּ בַחֲלִילָה פְנֶיךָ.
וַיַּעֲטֲרוּךָ נֶזֶר תְּפָאֲרָה.
וַיַּפְצִחוּ הָרִים רִנָּה.
וַיִּצְהָלוּ אֵיִים בְּמַלְכֶּךָ.
וַיִּקְבְּלוּ עַל מַלְכוּתְךָ עַלֵיהֶם.
וַיְרוֹמְמוּךָ בְּקֹהֶל עָם.
וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ רְחוֹקִים וַיָּבֹאוּ.
וַיִּתְּנוּ לָךְ כְּתֹר מְלוּכָה.

A core theme of Rosh Hashanah and the first of the holiday's special sections of *Musaf* (where we find this prayer) is called *Malchuyot*, or kingship. Rosh Hashanah is, to quote the movie *Frozen*, "Coronation Day!" — the day we anoint God as King. This in itself may not be enough to get you up on your feet clapping and swaying, but take a moment and imagine the alternative. If God is not the ruler over the earth then the job is open for dictators, despots, presidents, and prime ministers who do not see their power as limited or time-bound. God, at least the God I pray to, is working towards a world of justice, of peace, of hope, and of love. In this prayer, we crown the God that we pray to — the God we pray **for**, and declare that earthly rulers will come and go, this moment in history will pass, and in the end the world of our dreams will become reality.

I have deep admiration for the people who choose to lead our communities and our countries. But as long as we live in a world with so many unmet basic needs, so much hatred, and so much pain, the systems that guide our leaders will remain flawed and at times even deeply corrupt. Our tradition imagines a different reality, the possibility of a time when everyone has enough, when there is no war, no famine, no systemic inequity — and Adonai, Hashem, the God of many names and no names at all, is the ruler of that potential world. And once a year, we rededicate ourselves to building that world, crowning that ruler, living that reality. And because we know it feels far away and we will have to work the entire year (and likely our entire lives) to get there, we take a moment to imagine we are in that reality. We give ourselves a taste of that world to energize our work in the year ahead. And in that moment we dance. God, we anoint you with the crown of a just and loving divine rulership, and that is worthy of celebration.



The Sound of Silence on Rosh Hashana: The Hidden Meaning of the Akedah

Rabbi Rafael J. Polisuk

The reading of the *Akedah* on Rosh Hashanah enters the liturgy, it seems, as an afterthought. The tannaitic sources in Tractate Megillah offer several possibilities for the Torah reading and haftarah of the day, but the *Akedah* — the story of the Binding of Isaac by Abraham — is not among them.

Instead, these early readings frame Rosh Hashanah as *Yom Zikaron*, a day of remembrance: Hashem remembers Sarah, hears Hannah, and remembers the people of Israel with mercy. The later historical reality of two days of Rosh Hashanah, originally instituted because of uncertainty over the calendar, creates a new division. On the second day, the haftarah of divine remembrance remains, but a new Torah reading is attached to it: the trial of the *Akedah*.

The place of the *Akedah* on Rosh Hashanah, then, is more complex than it first appears. It was not always there, at least not in an obvious way. As the midrashim of the Rabbis suggest, the *Akedah* was surrounded by a deeply charged religious consciousness — perhaps too charged, at first, to be spoken aloud in the public liturgy.

For many modern Jewish thinkers, above all Rav Soloveitchik, and also for non-Jewish thinkers, the *Akedah* becomes the highest religious ideal. The human being stands before the divine command precisely where it collides with his deepest moral consciousness. The highest religious moment is the moment in which a person is called to surrender his moral understanding before the command of God.

It is therefore clear why, according to this approach, we invoke the *Akedah* on the Day of Judgment. We seek to remember the exalted merit of Avraham Avinu, who stood in the greatest of all trials before Hashem.

But in the worldview of the Rabbis, the picture is far more complex. The midrashim about the *Akedah* do not merely present Abraham as silent and obedient. Again and again, they open that silence and reveal that within it there is a claim: that something here does not cohere with the promise, with divine justice itself. Thus we read in the Jerusalem Talmud Tractate Ta'anit 2:4:

Abraham said before the Holy One: Master of the Universe, it is revealed and known before You that when You told me to offer up Isaac my son, I had what to answer and could have said before You that yesterday You told me, "Through Isaac shall your seed be called," while now You say, "Bring him up as an offering"?!'



After standing in the trial, Abraham gives voice to what he could have said from the very beginning — and Hashem does not reject his words. Abraham continues:

But I did not do so. Rather, I conquered my impulse and did Your will. So may it be Your will, Hashem my God, that when the children of Isaac my son enter into distress and have no one to advocate on their behalf, You Yourself will advocate on their behalf.

Abraham does not ask that only his obedience be remembered. He asks that his silence be remembered as well: a charged and restrained silence, within which the claim remains alive.

In Pesikta Rabbati, which develops the words of the Yerushalmi, the matter is formulated even more sharply in Abraham's voice:

"Just as I was silent and did not answer You, so too You should not answer them." The Holy One said to him: "So I shall do." Abraham said to Him: "Swear it to me." Immediately He did, as it is written: "By Myself I have sworn, declares Hashem."

The *Akedah* silences, as it were, Hashem Himself; not because there is no judgment and no truth, but because at the depth of the covenant there is another memory as well — the memory of unjustified suffering, of those places where the world, and even the divine, seem not to meet the standard of justice demanded of human beings.

This is also how we may understand the discussion in Tractate Rosh Hashanah 16a about the blowing of the shofar:

Rabbi Abbahu said: Why do we blow with the shofar of a ram? The Holy One said: Blow before Me with the shofar of a ram, so that I may remember for you the Akedah of Isaac. And Rabbi Yitzchak said: Why do we blow on Rosh Hashanah? In order to confuse the Satan.

Rabbi Abbahu's teaching about the ram's horn appears next to the cryptic words of Rabbi Yitzchak, according to whom the shofar comes "to confuse the Satan." It seems that the Rabbis saw the *Akedah* not only as an exalted religious ideal, but also as a symbol of the problem of evil, of theodicy. The *Akedah* is connected with the figure of the Satan, the accuser, who first appears in Tanakh in the story of Job — the great story of the righteous person who suffers without having sinned. More than Satan being an actual supernatural entity, he represents two dimensions at once: on the one hand, the attribute of judgment that accuses; and on the other, the reality of unjustified evil. This connection is made clear by Rav Nissim Gaon, one of the earliest commentators on the Talmud:

But in this world we know that suffering comes upon children and upon the righteous... And this trial is like the matter of Job, about whom Scripture testified... that he was not deserving of the troubles and suffering that came upon him... And suffering is brought upon the righteous merely because of the words of the Satan. Since on Rosh Hashanah all creatures are remembered, we blow in order that the Akedah of Isaac be remembered for us, and in order to confuse the Satan and push him away from us.

The blowing of the shofar is not only a request that Hashem remember the merit of our ancestors. It is also a renewed raising of the claim that the *Akedah* itself embodies. In the face of our failures, our sins, and the attribute of judgment that seeks to examine us to the finest degree — we also raise before Hashem our own claim. It is not only You, as it were, who can stand in judgment over us. We too have something to say about Your world, about You.

From here it becomes clear that the *Akedah* is not only a symbol of self-sacrifice. It is also a testimony to the injustice of the world. It brings into presence the sharpest religious question of all: How can it be that the world of Hashem, who is good and benevolent, is filled with pain that is not distributed according to any simple justice? How can children and righteous people — the children of Isaac in the deepest sense — enter into distress and have no one to advocate for them?

This is one of the deepest questions of faith. One who believes in the goodness of Hashem cannot easily accept a world in which there is so much suffering. It is precisely faith in divine goodness that makes the injustice of the world unbearable. The *Akedah* brings this tension into the heart of prayer.

We invoke the *Akedah* not only as merit, but also as a claim that silences accusation. We bring before Hashem everything that does not cohere: suffering, righteous people who were broken, children who did not sin, Job and all those like him in our fractured world. Not in carefully ordered speech, but in the broken, thunderous sound of the *teruah*.

And before that sound, the attribute of judgment weakens, and the accusing Satan is confused. There is silence. In this way, the words of the *paytan* in *Unetaneh Tokef*, literally translated, receive renewed meaning: “A great shofar will be sounded, and a sound of sheer silence will be heard.” After the blowing of the shofar, silence descends upon the world — from our side and from Hashem’s side.

For a moment, we lay down our claims against one another. Hashem does not press the full measure of accusation against us, and we do not press before Him the full pain of His world. The charge is not answered, and it is not erased. It is held in silence. The shofar does not resolve the question; it creates the possibility that, after everything has been sounded, human beings and Hashem can stand again before one another without accusation.

It is a moment of mutual restraint, of mutual forgiveness. Not because the claims have been answered, but because the covenant is deeper than explanation. At the root of the covenant there is not only command and obedience, not only judgment and merit, but also the capacity to remain together in silence after all claims have been sounded.

And so the blessing of *Zikhronot* concludes: “And the *Akedah* of Isaac, for his descendants, may You remember with compassion. Blessed are You, Hashem, who remembers the covenant.” A covenant of silence, a promise of mutual compassion.



Shabbat Shuvah: Returning Changed

Rabbi Jess Minnen

Shabbat Shuvah occupies a curious place in the Jewish calendar. It falls during the *Aseret Yemei Teshuvah*, the Ten Days of Repentance, after the judgment of Rosh Hashanah and before the atonement of Yom Kippur. It is a time suspended between anxiety and hope.

Yet unlike other special Sabbaths, it is not mentioned by name in the Mishnah or Talmud. Rabbinic literature refers to the day as what it is: the Shabbat between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The name Shabbat Shuvah emerges later, derived from the opening word of its haftarah:

שׁוּבָה יִשְׂרָאֵל עַד ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ

Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God!

Hosea 14:2

The choice of this haftarah is ancient. Already in the Geonic period, communities read Hosea 14 during this Shabbat, together with concluding verses from Joel and Micah emphasizing repentance, divine mercy, and restoration¹. The selection is striking. The defining word is not judgment, awe, or atonement. It is return.

The destination is unambiguous: return to God. But the path is not. What does it mean to return to God? And what does Shabbat itself contribute to the work of *teshuvah*?

At first glance, Shabbat and *teshuvah* seem to pull in opposite directions. *Teshuvah* is restless. One who repents is aware, often painfully, of the distance between who she is and who she hopes to become. *Teshuvah* refuses to accept the self as fixed or complete. Shabbat appears to ask for something different. Medieval and early modern commentators portray Shabbat as a discipline of sufficiency. By refraining from creative labor, writes Ramban, we imitate God's own cessation from creation². The Maharal goes further: "Shabbat is completion, for on Shabbat the world was completed³." On Shabbat, the world is not something to repair or improve. We experience the world, and the self, if only briefly, as whole.

¹ Joel 2:15–27 and Micah 7:18–20. See *Siddur Rav Amram Gaon*, Seder Rosh Hashanah; *Machzor Vitry*, no. 343; *Shulchan Arukh*, Orach Chayim 428:8.

² Ramban, commentary to Exodus 20:8

³ Tiferet Yisrael 40



How, then, is this tension lived? How does one inhabit a season that insists simultaneously on self-critique and self-acceptance, on becoming and being? The history of Shabbat Shuvah suggests that Jewish tradition answered these questions not primarily through theology, but through practice.

Rabbi Yaakov Moelin, the Maharil (c. 1365–1427), records the established custom of an extended address on Shabbat Shuvah devoted to the laws of Yom Kippur, fasting, vows, sukkah, and lulav⁴. He did not instruct the congregation on how to feel. He taught them how to live. *Teshuvah* was not merely an inward experience. It was learned, practiced, and enacted within the rhythms of communal life. *Teshuvah* certainly requires remorse, confession, and self-examination. But it also demands preparation, study, and disciplined practice. The work of changing oneself unfolds not outside *halakhah*, but within it.

The Tur, in his laws of the Ten Days of Repentance, recommends heightened religious scrupulousness during this period. Even someone who is not ordinarily careful about certain standards of *kashrut*, he writes, should adopt stricter practices during these days⁵. The *Shulchan Arukh* codifies these customs, presenting the *Aseret Yemei Teshuvah* as a period of intensified moral and ritual attentiveness⁶.

The halakhic rigor of the season rests on a remarkable premise: that through *teshuvah* a person can become, in some meaningful sense, someone new. This possibility is rooted in an even more fundamental conviction: *teshuvah* is possible not because human beings possess unlimited powers of self-invention, but because we stand in an enduring relationship with God.

This covenantal understanding of *teshuvah* is already present in Hosea. The prophet does not imagine repentance as moral improvement alone. He imagines it as the repair of a damaged relationship.

קחו עמכם דברים ושובו אל ה' אמרו אליו כל תשוא עון וקח טוב

Take with you words, and return to the Lord. Say to God: Forgive all guilt and accept what is good.

Hosea 14:3

The relationship between God and Israel has been strained, but not severed. Return is possible because covenant endures. *Teshuvah* asks us to believe something equally difficult about ourselves: that our failures do not exhaust who we are. Beneath regret and remorse remains a self capable of return.

Covenant alone, however, cannot explain the extraordinary status tradition grants to the penitent.

מקום שבעלי תשובה עומדין אין צדיקים גמורים יכולין לעמוד

In the place where penitents stand, even the perfectly righteous cannot stand.

Berakhot 34b

⁴ *Minhagei Maharil*, Hilkhote Aseret Yemei Teshuvah; see also *Maharil HaHadashot*, Hilkhote Yom Kippur.

⁵ Tur, Orah Hayyim 603

⁶ *Shulchan Arukh*, Orah Hayyim 603:1



This is a startling claim. If *teshuvah* restores a person to an earlier state, why should the penitent surpass the righteous person who never sinned? Few articulate the answer more boldly than Maimonides. In *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 7:6 he writes:

אמש היה זה שנוי לפני המקום... והיום הוא אהוב ונחמד קרוב וידיד
*Yesterday this person was despised before God... Today he is beloved & cherished,
close and dear.*

Elsewhere, he imagines the penitent saying:

איני אותו האיש שעשה אותן המעשים
I am not the same person who committed those acts.
Hilkhot Teshuvah 2:4

Here the paradox of *teshuvah* comes fully into view. Covenant guarantees continuity. Transformation demands change. The self who confesses remains accountable for the self who acted. We are responsible for our past, but not imprisoned by it.

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik returned repeatedly to this paradox of continuity and change. "*Teshuvah*," he writes, "is an act of creation⁷." The penitent does not simply recover an earlier self. Rather, she creates herself anew, fashioning a future in response to, but not determined by, her past. *Teshuvah* does not erase what has been. It creates the possibility that what has been need not determine what will be.

The Sefat Emet, Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter of Ger, offers a striking complement to this idea. In his teachings on Shabbat Shuvah, he describes Shabbat as *behinat teshuvah*, an embodiment or mode of return⁸. Not because we repent on Shabbat, but because Shabbat itself is return. For six days the world expands outward through labor, ambition, and creation. On the seventh day, it returns to its source. We cease trying to master the world and instead learn to dwell within it. The world is experienced not as lacking, but as complete.

Hosea's command is therefore more demanding than it first appears:

שובה יִשְׂרָאֵל
Return, O Israel!

Return not to an earlier version of yourself, untouched by failure. Return to the covenant that precedes your failures and outlasts them. Return knowing that change is possible because your worth does not depend upon achieving perfection.

Perhaps this is the deepest lesson of Shabbat Shuvah. *Teshuvah* is not only the repair of a damaged relationship with God. It is also the repair of our relationship with ourselves. Return, says Hosea. Return to God. Return to the self that God never gave up on.

⁷ Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *On Repentance: The Thought and Oral Discourses of Rabbi Joseph Dov Soloveitchik*, ed. Pinchas H. Peli (Jerusalem: Orot, 1979), 92–94
⁸ Sefat Emet, *Shabbat Shuvah*, 5643 (1882)



Yom Kippur: The Hard Work of Forgiveness

Rabbanit Nechama Goldman Barash

In the aftermath of Tisha b'Av we begin the gradual journey in time towards the introspective days of Elul and Tishrei, which demand of us increased awareness of our accountability in relation to God and one another. This syncs well with the overall theme of Deuteronomy — whose Torah portions we read in synagogue during the late summer — in which Moshe continuously reminds the nation that the choice to be in relationship with God through accepting Torah and mitzvot is theirs to make, along with a reminder of the consequences of rejecting or abandoning the covenant. In effect, choice and consequence are two of the most important aspects of our interaction not only with God, but with every person we come into relationship with. One of the most inspiring aspects of the approaching High Holy Days is the notion that we have second chances in our relationship with God, and that the mere experience of Yom Kippur can procure atonement. There is a famous statement in Tractate Yoma 85b that reinforces this idea:

For transgressions between man and the Omnipresent Yom HaKippurim procures atonement; for transgressions between man and his fellow man Yom HaKippurim does not procure atonement until he has pacified his fellow man.

While God is willing to wipe the slate clean, so to speak, through the medium of Yom Kippur, the Talmud recognizes the greater complexity in our relationships with one another and the need for direct engagement rather than passive experience. To that end, there are many stories in the Talmud of fallings-out that take place on Yom Kippur Eve that remind us how fragile a process it is to repair the pain and offense we inflict upon one another. Many of the stories end tragically with no possibility for atonement. Reading them, one gets a sense that there is a deeper message teaching us that reflexive apologies on the eve of Yom Kippur because “we have to” are never going to allow for true reconciliation.

There is one story in particular (Shabbat 127b) that I return to when I think about the internal work needed when two people attempt the difficult path towards true forgiveness. The Talmud begins by teaching that “one who judges another favorably is himself judged favorably.” This is the kind of teaching that we grow up hearing and repeating as if stating it will make it come true. In practice, however, it is one of the hardest things to implement in real time. A story is now brought to illustrate this principle:

A man travels from the north of Israel to work for someone in the south. He wants to return home on the eve of Yom Kippur after three years of work, and asks his employer for his wages. To his surprise, he is told in no uncertain terms that the employer has no wages, no produce, no land, no animals, not even cushions and blankets to pay him. The worker, showing enormous restraint, quietly turns to go home in anguish, neither demanding, threatening, nor cursing his employer. One can only imagine



what he faced when he walked into his house empty-handed after a three-year absence! Nonetheless, his marked restraint is the first turning point towards reconciliation.

The story continues. Several weeks later, after Sukkot, the employer makes a long journey from the south to the north, with the money he owes his worker. In addition, he brings three donkeys laden with food, drink, and sweets as a sign of his true desire to compensate the man for what he went through. However, what happens next, before compensation, is the next turning point in the story. The wealthy homeowner is welcomed into his worker's home. Crossing the threshold, the relationship now shifts from employer-employee to that of host-guest, with the worker acting as the host and inviting his boss into his home. His boss, in turn, sits down at a far more meager table than he is used to, and the two eat and drink together in an act of renewed intimacy. Only then does a conversation begin about what happened at that fateful moment on the eve of Yom Kippur several weeks earlier.

The homeowner opens things up by asking what his employee thought of him as he was consistently refusing to pay him. At each stage in the conversation, the employee describes how he was able to come up with a plausible explanation. It seems clear that he was able to draw on his relationship with his employer over three years of working in his home, which gave him daily proximity to the true character of the man. It was unthinkable to him that he was being cheated by someone he thought he knew well. As a result, at this moment of truth, he was able to draw on internal resources that gave him clarity to respond with compassion to the situation.

Once the employee has explained himself and shown true regard and even love for his employer, the employer now takes one final step towards true reconciliation, leading to an even greater intimacy, by exposing his own personal pain. He explains that the reason he in fact had no money or property to offer on the eve of Yom Kippur was because he had consecrated everything he owned to Heaven in order to avoid leaving anything to his son Hyrcanus, who had refused to engage in Torah study.

This is a moment of true vulnerability. The man who has power, money, and greater social stature admits to his humble employee that his son had rejected the religious life and values he holds dear. When that happened, out of terrible pain, he was wildly certain that the only punishment he could inflict on his son was cutting him out of his rightful inheritance. But it turned out there was a secondary consequence he did not anticipate: cheating his loyal employee. In truth, the choices we make often have greater implications than we are often willing to recognize on the surface. When the employer realized this, he chose to make a tremendous self-sacrifice in order to right this wrong. He traveled to his colleagues in the south, the leading sages of that generation, and suffered the humiliation of telling them the whole story so that they would nullify the vow that he had taken. Only then could he begin the physical and emotional journey northwards towards his employee.

There is so much that is inspiring in this text. Reconciliation is neither automatic nor simple. There is simultaneous movement throughout as each person leaves his comfort zone — physically and emotionally — becoming vulnerable and in the process even more intimate and dependent on the other person. In this story we understand the enormous work that goes into the space that must be created in order to ask for or accept forgiveness. It is appropriate that in the aftermath of Tisha b'Av, when we remember the brokenness of the world, that we use the days leading up to Yom Kippur to begin the true process of repair.

Shanah Torah!

