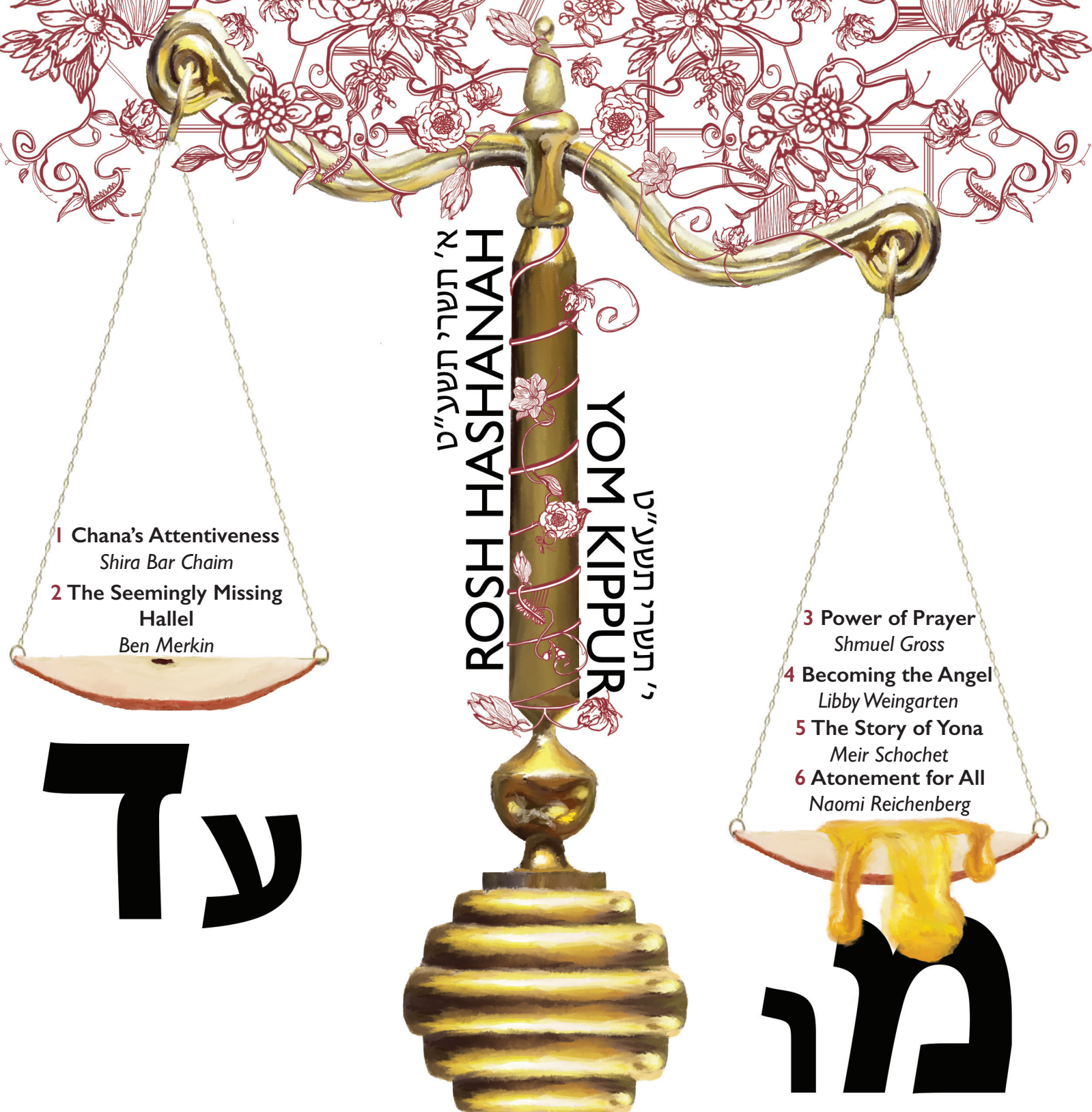


# MOED



א' תשרי תשע"ט

ROSH HASHANAH

י' תשרי תשע"ט

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- 1 Chana's Attentiveness  
*Shira Bar Chaim*
- 2 The Seemingly Missing Hallel  
*Ben Merkin*

- 3 Power of Prayer  
*Shmuel Gross*
- 4 Becoming the Angel  
*Libby Weingarten*
- 5 The Story of Yona  
*Meir Schochet*
- 6 Atonement for All  
*Naomi Reichenberg*

# עז

# מר



# Chana's Attentiveness

*Shira Bar Chaim* ('21)

For the first day of Rosh Hashanah, our sages selected the story of Chana as the reading for the haftarah. The book of Shoftim relates how Chana's co-wife, Penina, had one child after the other, while Chana remained barren. Chana was extremely pained by her childless state. One year, on the family's annual pilgrimage to the Mishkan in Shilo, her pain was completely unbearable. She went to the Mishkan and poured out her heavy and burdened heart to Hashem in prayer. She vowed and said, "Hashem, Master of Legions, if you take note of the suffering of your maidservant and you remember and do not forget your maidservant, and give your maidservant a male offspring, then, I shall give him to Hashem all the days of his life and a razor will not come upon his head" (Shmuel I: 1:11). Hashem answered her prayers and she conceived a child. She kept her promise and after two years dedicated his life to the service of Hashem in the Mishkan in Shilo. Her child was the great prophet Shmuel who led the Jewish people.

Although Chana's story really captures our hearts and emotions, its relevance to Rosh Hashana requires further explanation. One might suggest that since very often the haftarah is themed after the Torah reading, this haftarah was chosen because the Torah reading dealt with Sarah conceiving after being barren for many years. However, this explanation alone is not very satisfying. It also does not explain what either woman's struggle to conceive has to do with Rosh Hashanah. Our commentators suggest two other reasons as to why the story of Chana is read on Rosh Hashanah. The main theme of Rosh Hashana is recognizing Hashem as King and Master of the Universe. Serving Hashem through sincere prayer demonstrates that He is our King and Master and that

we are His subjects. Additionally, our sages teach us that prayer has the power to protect us from the suffering of heavenly decrees and therefore we pray on Rosh Hashanah, the beginning of the period of judgement.

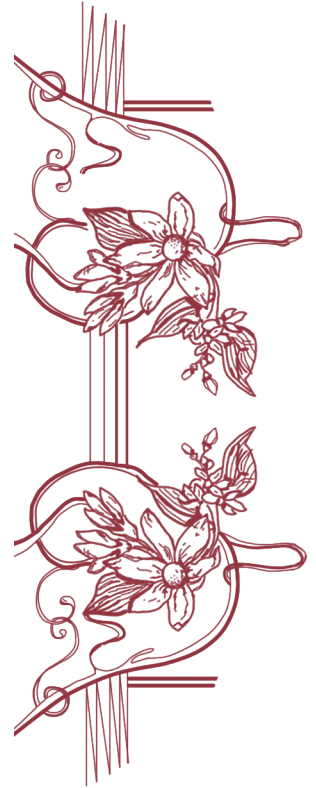
Rav Hershel Schachter explains that Rosh Hashanah is the Day of Judgement and is therefore considered a troublesome time, which obligates us to daven to Hashem as there is a biblical mitzvah to daven during troublesome times. This explains why we read about Chana's heartfelt prayer to Hashem on Rosh Hashanah. We also learn from here that Hashem listens to our heartfelt prayers as He did for Chana. In fact, the gemara (Megillah 31a) teaches that Hashem remembered both Sarah and Chana on Rosh Hashanah and therefore they both conceived children on Rosh Hashanah. We learn from this that Rosh Hashanah is not simply a time for prayer but it is also the day on which God answers our prayers. We learn from Chana that prayer is not merely something we do on Rosh Hashanah, rather prayer is the main service and goal of Rosh Hashanah. Our judgement for the entire year depends on the quality of our prayer on Rosh Hashanah. With this in mind, let us pray with more intensity and intention on Rosh Hashanah, and in that merit may everyone be blessed by God for a sweet, wonderful, and successful new year.



## The Seemingly Missing Hallel

*Ben Merkin* ('21)

During Rosh Hashanah, unlike many other yamim tovim, we do not say Hallel during davening. But why not? Most people, when faced with this question, merely say that the day is a day of mourning as well as simcha, since we aren't sure which "book" we'll be put into: the Book of Life or the Book of Death. However, this answer is problematic in and of itself. Don't we celebrate Rosh Hashanah happily? We dress up and eat lavish meals. We sing, eat new foods, and, most interestingly, in contrast to Yom Kippur, we don't fast. All of these things contradict the notion that Rosh Hashanah is supposed to be a day of sadness. During the day, we are supposed to expect to be put in the Book of Life, and for miracles to happen, so we act happily. What might be an additional and more conclusive answer? Even though we don't utter the written text of the prayer, we essentially say Hallel ourselves, through the blowing of the Shofar. According to Reb Nossan, the blowing of the shofar contains the ten types of song, which, when heard, inspire us to sing ourselves. This internal singing resonates deeply within us and counts as Hallel. So, technically, on Rosh Hashanah we do say Hallel, just a more personal and meaningful Hallel than the format we usually follow. May this Rosh Hashanah be filled with our own melodies and meaningfulness.





## Power of Prayer

*Shmuel Gross* ('19)

In addition to the numerous restrictions incumbent upon us on Yom Kippur, we spend the day in shul praying for the well-being of our family, community, nation, and for Hashem to pardon our sins. During the prayer services, we call out to Hashem both individually and in unison. We beat our chests as we list our sins in the **וידוי** portion of the davening as we reflect on our transgressions and hope that we are sealed in the Book of Life. This day of introspection and prayer – and the opportunity to once more enter Hashem's chamber at the conclusion of **עשרת ימי תשובה** – is certainly something to be grateful for, but can a single day of prayer and repentance really undo our sins?

The notion of one genuine tefillah having powers of great magnitude is expressed by David Hamelech, where he says:

**“פנה אל תפילת הערער ולא בזה את תפילתם”**  
 “Hashem turned to the tefillah of one who screams and cries out and He did not despise their tefillot” (Tehillim 102:18).

The pasuk first states **“ תפילת** singular form and then concludes with **“תפילתם”** in plural form. This grammatical inconsistency serves to demonstrate the transformative power of an individual tefillah. One heartfelt prayer can overturn any repeated tefillot not yet answered, to benefit an individual or the larger community. To further this point, the gematria of **“הערער”** is 545 and the gematria of **“מתוק”** is 546. The one number difference in the calculation of the gematria of these words shows the power of the single tefillah of the **“ערער”** who cries out to Hashem. This person can transform his year into one that is **“מתוק,”** full of sweetness.

**וידוי** is a critical component of the Yom Kippur prayer service. While nobody is perfect, it seems odd to focus on calling out our wrongdoings when we want to focus on our merits. Why do we focus on the negative aspects of the previous year? Through his famous image of “two papers in his pocket,” Rabbi Simcha Bunim of Pershyscha demonstrates the duality of life. In one pocket, he carries a paper that says, “I am like dust;” in the other he carries a paper that says, “the world was created for me.” In moments of overconfidence and pompousness, he pulls out the humbling message of his being like dust as a reminder not to have too much pride. In distressing, low moments in which he may doubt himself, he pulls out the paper stating that the world was created for him. This dual nature of human beings is reflected in the Yom Kippur davening. We say **וידוי** as we plead for forgiveness for our sins; it is a humbling and frightening experience. At the same time, the experience gives us hope by reminding each of us that the world was created for us.

Although we are imperfect, we recall the greatness of Hashem in our prayers and focus on us being His creations and His nation, in the hopes that this deems us worthy of redemption - if not by our own merits, then by those of our forefathers. Rather than just focusing on our guilty sentiments, as we pray for ourselves, our families, and our community, we should feel hopeful that we are cleansing ourselves from sin and elevating our relationship with Hashem. We should be grateful that Hashem has given us a chance for elevation. While awed and frightened, we should at the same time remember Hashem loves us and built the world for us. May all our tefillot on Yom Kippur be answered and may we all be written in the Book of Life.



## Becoming The Angel

*Libby Weingarten* ('19)

Yom Kippur, the holiest day in the Jewish calendar, is almost universally observed by Jews of all backgrounds. Deemed “Shabbat Shabbaton,” the day is spent in earnest prayer and confession, a reflection of the elaborate *avodah* that took place in the years of the Beit Hamikdash. But what do the abstentions from our physical daily activities have to do with the pursuit of atonement for our sins? How can we hope to achieve forgiveness from God for our many sins on this one, singular day? There is an important principle in Jewish thought that the contamination of sin comes from one’s exterior being, as opposed to one’s interior. The essence of a Jew, his inner soul, remains pure and can never be tainted. The soul is, “a spark of the divine” placed within each Jew. In the morning prayer we say “O God, the neshamah, soul, that you placed within me, is pure: אֱלֹהֵי, נְשָׁמָה שְׁנַתַּת בִּי טְהוֹרָה הִיא.” Sin is therefore an unwelcomed intrusion. It is the physical temptation of external surroundings, hoping to grab some negative attention. The literal translation of the word teshuvah is “returning to oneself.” This means identifying oneself with the soul and not associating oneself with the body. Shabbat, as the seventh day of the week, is when the physical world of creation “returns” to God its Creator. Yom Kippur, as one can imagine, is an even more intense Shabbat, where atonement for man’s misdemeanors demands returning to one’s spiritual roots in repentance and coming close to God. The day’s atonement and focus calls for man to rise above his bodily needs, above the things that have caused him to sin. He is prohibited from activities that involve his body or express his physicality such as eating and drinking, because, as explained by the Maharal, this is a day in which the entire emphasis is on returning to one’s spiritual and pure essence. As such, Yom Kippur is when man metaphorical-

ly becomes an angel. Identifying himself exclusively with his pure essence expresses his disassociation from sin. The way to national and personal forgiveness is to confess and repent by declaring complete detachment from one’s past failures, *teshuva gemura*, when the external layers of sin are discarded. This is the atonement of Yom Kippur, when the true nature of every Jew, his pristine spiritual soul, is of paramount importance. The momentous opportunity offered by Yom Kippur is ours for the taking. We hope and pray that we merit atonement to be inscribed and sealed for a year of life and goodness.

*(Adapted from Rabbi Chaim Osher Levene)*





# The Story of Yonah

*Meir Schochet ('21)*

Moshe lists the various leadership roles within Bnei Yisrael that would emerge after his passing. Moshe mentions not only the priest, judge and kingship roles, but also the prophet, or the Navi (Devarim 18:15): “Hashem will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him.” Moshe would not be the last of the prophets, Neviim, as there would be numerous successors after him; from the days of Shmuel HaNavi, to the Second Beit Hamikdash period, each generation gave rise to men – and sometimes women – who told Hashem’s word with immense bravery to disapprove of kings, criticize priests, or rebuke an entire generation for its lack of faith and morality. However, a blatant question presents itself: How does one tell a true prophet from a false one? Unlike kings or priests, prophets did not receive authority from formal office. Rather their authority laid in their personality, their ability to speak the word of Hashem, and their self-evident inspiration. Since a prophet has privileged access to the word others cannot hear and to visions others cannot see, this creates the possibility of false prophets, like Baal in the days of King Ahab. So, what precautions were enacted to prevent a false prophet, or even a sincere, but mistaken person who performs signs and wonders, unintentionally misleading the Jews?

There are several dimensions to this question. One facet is mentioned in Parshat Shoftim, namely the prophet’s ability to foretell the future. Moshe states (Devarim 18:21-22): “You may say to yourselves, ‘How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the Lord?’ If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him.” At first glance,

the test seems easy; if what the prophet prophecies comes to pass, he is a true prophet; if not, he is a false prophet. However this test was more complex, as portrayed in the Book of Yonah.

Yonah is commanded by Hashem to warn the people of Nineveh that their wickedness is about to bring destruction to them. Yonah attempts to flee, but fails in the famous story of the sea, the storm, and the “great fish.” Eventually he goes to Nineveh and utters the words Hashem has commanded him to say (Yonah 3:4): “Forty more days and Nineveh will be destroyed.” The people repent and the city is spared. Yonah, however, is deeply dissatisfied (Yonah 4:1-3): “But Yonah was greatly displeased and became angry. He prayed to the Lord, ‘O Lord, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate Hashem, slow to anger and abundant in love, a Hashem who relents from sending calamity. Now, O Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.’” Yonah’s complaint can be understood in two ways. First, he was upset that Hashem had forgiven the people, since they were wicked and deserved punishment. Why did a mere change of heart and plea for forgiveness release them from their punishment? Second, he had been made a fool, having told them that in forty days the city would be destroyed, and it wasn’t. Yonah has no right to be upset, which is clear from the rhetorical question with which the book concludes (Yonah, 4:11): “Should I [Hashem] not be concerned about that great city?” Should I not be merciful? Should I not forgive?”

**(CONTINUED ON PAGE 6)**



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What then becomes of the criterion Moshe lays down for distinguishing between a true and false prophet: “If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken?” Yonah had said that the city would be destroyed in forty days. It wasn’t destroyed, and yet his claim was true; he did speak the words of Hashem. How can this be so? The answer is found in the Book of Yirmiyahu. Yirmiyahu was prophesying a national calamity. The people had drifted from Hashem, and the punishment would be defeat and exile. This message was difficult and demoralizing for the people to hear. A false prophet arose, Hananiah son of Azzur, claiming the opposite: Babylon, Israel’s enemy, would soon fall and within two years the crisis would be over. Yirmiyahu recognized the incorrect prophecy and realized that Hananiah was telling the people what they wanted to hear, not what they needed to hear. He addressed the assembled people (Yirmiyahu 28:6): “He said, ‘Amen! May the Lord do so! May the Lord fulfill the words you have prophesied by bringing the articles of the Lord’s house and all the exiles back to this place from Babylon. Nevertheless, listen to what I have to say in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people: From early times the prophets who preceded you and me have prophesied war, disaster and plague against many countries and great kingdoms. But the prophet who prophesies peace will be recognized as one truly sent by the Lord only if his prediction comes true.’” Yirmiyahu makes a fundamental distinction between good news and bad. It is easy to prophesize disaster. If the prophecy comes true, then you have spoken the truth. If it does not, then one can say: Hashem stopped and forgave. A negative prophecy cannot be refuted – but a positive one

can. If the good foreseen comes to pass, then the prophecy is true. If it does not, then you cannot say, “Hashem changed His mind” because Hashem does not retract from a promise He made of good, peace, or return. It is therefore only when the prophet offers a positive vision that he can be tested. That is why Yonah was wrong to believe he had failed when his negative prophecy, the destruction of Nineveh, failed to come true. Several fundamental conclusions are drawn from this. A prophet is not an oracle, and a prophecy is not a prediction. Precisely because Judaism believes in free will, the human future can never be absolutely predicted; people are capable of change and Hashem forgives. As we say in our prayers on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur: “Prayer, penitence, and charity avert the evil decree.” There is no decree that cannot be revoked. A prophet does not predict, he warns. A prophet does not speak to predict future catastrophe but rather to prevent it. If a prediction comes true it has succeeded, but if a prophecy comes true it has failed.

The real test of prophecy is not bad news but good news. Catastrophe proves nothing, and anyone can foretell these things without risking his reputation or authority. It is only by prophesying a good event that a prophet’s truth is tested. So it was with Bnei Yisrael’s prophets. They warned of the dangers that lay ahead, but they were also bringers of hope. They could see beyond the catastrophe to the consolation. That is the test of a true prophet.

*(Adapted from Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks)*



# Atonement for All

Naomi Reichenberg ('22)

The infrastructure of Yom Kippur stems from when Hashem made a covenant of love to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov which was demonstrated through the Brit Milah, or circumcision. From there it was only strengthened as He took us out of Egypt, and finally was concluded when he gave us the Torah at Har Sinai. The outcome of this covenant is that the world continues to exist (Shabbat 88a). On Yom Kippur, Bnei Yisrael found out about this promise because this was the day that Hashem had fully forgiven them for the sin of the golden calf. Therefore, to this day, we are commanded to observe Yom Kippur, the day Hashem revealed his love to our nation. In the times of the Beit Hamikdash, the Kohen Gadol would go into the Kodesh Hakedoshim and would atone for the sins of the *klal*. This shows an act of communal atonement already present in the times of our ancestors. The *vidui* process is also spoken in plural form. How can one say, “we have stolen, we have extorted,” when they are seemingly careful with other people’s money. He or she certainly didn’t intentionally rebel. The *vidui* is a perfect example of “k’eish echad belev echad” (Like one man with one heart). Yom Kippur itself is a time for all of Israel to come as one and do teshuva. For that reason specifically, our sages made it so that we are confessing the sins of the entire *klal* just as the Kohen Gadol did in the times of the Beit Hamikdash. The difference between Yom Kippur and any other day is that our teshuva is more openly accepted on this day. Obviously you are able to do teshuva on any day that you desire, but Yom Kippur is specifically designed for forgiveness and atonement for all of Israel. On this day, Hashem expects us to rise to the occasion and atone for all of the sins of our nation, while also repenting for our personal sins. As this school year is off to a great

start, we have really all begun to come together as one, and that’s what communal atonement is all about. May we all be *zoche* to experience our tefillot for the whole *klal* being answered by Hakadosh Baruch Hu, and may we all see the coming of Mashiach, b’mehera b’yameinu. Chag Sameach!

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