



SIMCHAT SHMUEL

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There is an interesting teaching about the essence of *Rosh Hashanah* from the **Sefat Emet**, Rebbe Yehuda Aryeh Leib Alter, zt'l, the **Gerrer Rebbe zy'a**. The Rebbe wrote:

"The essence of Rosh Hashanah is tefila. There are four mitzvot which form our daily routine; the recitation of the Shema, the wearing of tefilin, the donning of tzitzit, and tefila. It is written in many holy works that these four mitzvot correspond to the four letter Divine name. Also, the various holidays each parallel one of these four mitzvot. Pesach is representative of the tefilin which we bind to our arm, recalling the "outstretched arm" that redeemed us from Egypt; Shavuot is linked to the recitation of the Shema, which includes the passage: 'I have instructed you on this day' (recalling the giving of the Torah at Sinai); Sukkot recalls the mitzva of tzitzit, as the Sukka, much like the tzitzit garment, represents being enveloped by Divine protection. The days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are in essence all about tefila..."

The Sefat Emet suggests that there are four common daily rituals that are each symbolically paralleled by the essence and nature of one of our four Biblical Holiday periods. One might

infer that the Rebbe is suggesting that the extra spiritual fervor, inspiration and joy that are often easier for us to experience during each of our festivals, should somehow inspire us and help us to experience its parallel daily ritual, and really all of our daily conduct, in a more meaningful, and spiritually conscious way.

Given that we are on the eve of *Rosh Hashanah*, let us explore further the parallel daily mitzva of tefila, which the Sefat Emet viewed as the essence of the entire ten day period between *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*. Let's begin to clarify just how much transformative potential exists within the experience of tefila in its purest form.

HaRav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohein Kook, zy'a spoke the following words in a public discourse on prayer (As cited in the work *Mishnat HaRav*, pg 72...):

"The difference between an individual who prays and one who does not pray, is not that one sets aside time each day to pray and the second does not set aside time for this purpose. Rather, there is a profound fundamental difference. The quality of life of each of these two is completely different! That time set aside for prayer, makes a profound impact on the entire day."

According to Rav Kook zy'a, tefila, is much more than taking time out of our day to recite some Hebrew words as quickly as we possibly can, and tefila is much more than an opportunity to make requests, or plead our case before *Hakodosh Baruch Hu*, as so many people envision as the prime objective of our high holiday prayer, and prayer in general. According to Rav Kook, the experience of tefila

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somehow has the capacity to transform our entire outlook, our entire daily routine, our entire quality of life.

Rav Yosef Dov HaLevi Soloveitchik *zt'l* wrote that many perceive prayer as a conversation, a dialogue with the Divine. Rabbi Soloveitchik suggests that *tefila* is much more than a conversation, or a dialogue between acquaintances. *Tefila*, said Rabbi Soloveitchik should be experienced as though we have come so close to the Divine within each of us that we feel the collision, of colliding with G-d's presence. *Tefila* is not a random discussion between two distant acquaintances, rather the most intimate of conversations between man and Hashem.

How are we to understand the words of Rav Kook and Rav Soloveitchik within the context of *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*? If the goal of *tefila* is not to petition or make any requests, rather to enter into a pure, loving, intimate discourse with *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*; and as the *Sefat Emet* suggests the very essence of *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* is *tefila*, how are we to make sense of the many liturgical references to forgiveness, mercy, compassion, and judgment? It seems quite clear from much of the traditional liturgy, that indeed we have gathered to make many, many pleas, both personal and communal.

There is a well known verse from Psalm 118 (verse 5), that is recited as part of the *Hallel* which we recite on *Rosh Chodesh* (beginning of each month) and Festivals, which is also one of the many verses recited immediately before the *Shofar* is sounded on *Rosh Hashanah*.



Piaseczno Rebbe zt'l

"From the depths I called out to G-d, with Divine relief he answered me..."

Rabbi Klonymous Kalmish Shapira Hy"d, the Rebbe of Piaseczna zy'a, in his incredibly moving collection of sermons on the *Torah* and Holidays - *Aish Kodesh* wrote the following words regarding this verse:

"For people like us, especially in such terrible, bitter anguish, it is impossible not to cry out and pray to G-d, even on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, about our pain and suffering. This in itself is a source of distress, and our

soul cries out bitterly that even during such holy days as these we are reduced to praying 'Give us life! Give us food!' instead of loftier, altruistic prayers for the needs and sake of heaven...

...This is the meaning of the verse 'From the depths I called out to Hashem, with Divine relief he answered me.' At present, I am calling from the depths of my pain, but please Hashem, respond with divine relief, so

that I am able to pray from comfort and plenitude, so that I can pray properly, unselfishly, for the sake of expressing our closeness to the Ribono Shel Olam."

The Rebbe, from the depths of the Warsaw Ghetto, where he ministered to so many

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amidst the devastation, is teaching us a very profound idea regarding the experience of *Tefila*. *Tefila*, as it is most often experienced by man in our human frailty, is often very self centered-either out of a sense of obligation, or as an outgrowth and response to a personal need or challenging circumstance. But *tefila*, prayer in its purest form, says the Rebbe, and echoed by the words of Rav Soloveitchik, is the experience of calling out to *Hashem*, not from the depths of despair and pain, but rather from a space of comfort, utter *bitachon*/*trust*, heightened spiritual consciousness and love.

Similarly, the **Noam Elimelech, Reb Elimelech MiLijensk zy'a** offers a beautiful understanding of *tefila* as an act of connection, the very means through which we bind ourselves to *Hashem*. On *Rosh Hashanah*, then, our many hours of *tefila* are not only an opportunity to ask *Hashem* for what we need, but to experience anew that closeness at the heart of this sacred day.

Perhaps, now we can better understand the words of the *Sefat Emet*, “*the days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are in essence all about tefila...*”

May we indeed be blessed to *daven* this *Rosh Hashanah* not solely from that place of pain and concern that has become all too familiar to each of us, but rather may we finally merit to once again not feel that need to plead for salvation, but rather have the ability to offer *tefilot* of *hakarat hatov*, *nechama*, *bitachon* and love.

Shana Tova Umetuka, Ketiva Vchatima Tova. ■

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