



JEN AIRLEY

INSPIRATIONAL SPEAKER
MOTHER OF SGT. BINYAMIN HY''D

YOM KIPPUR

The Magic of Yom Kippur

As I listened to the ba'al tefillah's beautiful niggunim during the repetition of Mussaf on Rosh Hashana, I found myself dreaming.

Dreaming of Yom Kippur in the Beit HaMikdash.

The Seder HaAvodah has been one of my favorite Yom Tov experiences ever since I first learned about it in high school. There is something almost magical about watching the Kohen Gadol move through that extraordinary day: the precision and alacrity required of him, the enormous responsibility resting on his shoulders, the changing of his elaborate and holy, simple linen clothings, the daily services and korbanot alongside the special Yom Kippur offerings.

Yom Kippur has always been my favorite day of the year.

For one day, we spend our time intimately with Hashem. We dress in white. We become angelic. The distractions of the physical world recede. Nothing else matters.

And at the end of it all, we have the possibility of coming out beautifully clean.

The red thread turned white!

Atoned and Purified. What an extraordinary gift.

We have been forgiven. לפני ה' טהרו!

A fresh slate.

And then the Kohen Gadol emerges from

the Kodesh HaKodashim—alive!

His face is glowing.

Our prayer captures the moment in the unforgettable words of מראה כהן:

“אמת מה נהדר היה גדול בצאתו מבית קדשי

הקדשים בשלום בלי פגע”

“How magnificent was the Kohen Gadol when he emerged from the Holy of Holies in peace, unharmed.”

The piyut goes on to describe him with images of light and the celestial: כוכב הנוגה. בגבול מזרח... כברקים היוצאים מזוי החיות. Like a shining star on the eastern horizon, like flashes of lightning emerging from the radiance of the heavenly beings.

I could almost see him.

The excitement. The joy. The relief. The radiance.

Forget all the scientific and psychological terminology of manifestation and visualization. There is something deeply Jewish about simply envisioning the end goal.

This was a pivotal mussaf for me. The moment of transformation, really.

Erev Rosh Hashana morning began with a very different, heavy feeling.

What will this year bring? More war and loss? Sickness or health? Will it be the year of Eternal joy and Peace? What awaits us? Will it be a year of life and goodness?

Shortly thereafter, word came of the passing of my dear friend, Shira Schijveschuuder.

We went to her funeral at noon on Erev Rosh Hashana. For an hour and a half, hundreds of us listened to a mussar shmues (in the form of hespedim) more powerful than

anything even the greatest rabbi could have prepared.

Through brain surgeries, chemotherapy, radiation, hospitalizations and unimaginable challenges, Shira had trained herself to see the beauty. To focus on the gifts. On kindness. On gratitude. She literally cloaked herself in gratitude—with love and laughter and genuine concern for others.

I left feeling that we had gained another powerhouse defender in Shamayim ahead of Judgement Day.

From that funeral, our entire immediate family went to Har Herzl to spend time with Binyamin, including our newest few week old granddaughter, Hodaya Liora. (Yes, named to thank Hashem for His kindnesses and blessings)

We prayed. We cried. We sang.

And we were not alone. Other families were also at the cemetery visiting their loved ones a couple of hours ahead of Yom HaDin.

I felt a little more prepared. A little more confident.

Then came the Zichronot section of Mussaf.

And as I read those words, I found myself almost “reminding” Hashem.

Hashem, remember the sacrifices families have made for Am Yisrael.

Remember the plethora of unbelievable chessed initiatives that have emerged from these difficult years.

Remember the people who are volunteering to live with discomfort and danger on farms in order to protect the people and the Land.

Remember Shira’s husband and children, who came to shul for Rosh Hashana tefillot barely 24 hours after her passing.

Look at how many people are sick, pained, troubled, and grieving and still placing their faith in You, Hashem.

Hashem, do I need to “remind” You how incredible Your children are??

And that’s when I started dreaming of Yom Kippur and the Seder haAvodah.

Elul, Selichot and Rosh Hashana were only the beginning of this process.

The stage has been set.

The parameters have been established.

Now comes the intimate part.

The mending and improving of my personal relationship.

That is this week.

And then comes Yom Kippur—the precious, holiest day.

Our own journey into the Kodesh HaKodashim.

We can imagine what it feels like for our sins to be transformed, for our slate to be wiped clean, for the Kohen Gadol to emerge radiant and for the entire nation to breathe again.

And perhaps that is part of the magic of Yom Kippur.

We are given permission to dream of the ending.

To believe that forgiveness is possible.

To believe that transformation is within reach.

To believe that after everything we have carried into this year, we can walk out lighter.

Cleaner. Closer.

לא נפלאות היא ממך ולא רחוקה היא.

It is not beyond us. It is not too far away.

The Kodesh HaKodashim is closer than we think. ■

The **Airleys** have built **Beit Binyamin**, a retreat center in Tzfat for those directly affected by the war. Soldiers, Zaka members, security forces, bereaved families and widows can come for respite, relaxation and rejuvenation. For more information and to donate, visit Beitbinyamin.org