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Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur Reader

From the Bayit Social Action Committee

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Introduction

Welcome to the HIR Social Action Committee's first ever Rosh Hashanah/Yom Kippur Reader! The world looks different than a year ago, and yet social action and changing the world for the better remain a focus of the Social Action Committee. We hope that the pieces herein can be useful inspiration as you think about the year ahead and reflect on the year behind you, and urge you to consider using some of these pieces as conversation starters at your Yom Tov dinner and lunch tables (and urge you to print double-sided in doing so as we have much material for you!).

As with our previous compilation, you will find various themes in the pieces to follow, related to our broader collective ideals or specifics like hunger and criminal justice that our committee has worked to spotlight at scale and within our community in the past year, and will continue to work toward in the year ahead. Torah values guide every minute of our work as a committee, and we echo that here by conveying words of Torah with the themes that are ever present in our work together.

Please consider joining us in our efforts in the year ahead, both in writing words of Torah (which you can sign up for by emailing Aaron Stayman at AaronStayman1@gmail.com) and in our committee meetings (which you can attend by emailing Michael Goldblum at mgoldblum@buildingstudio.com). We wish you all a Gmar Chatima Tova, and a fruitful year of meaningful social action within our community!



From MorganAndresen.dk

Individualism and the High Holiday Service

By Michael Goldblum

Guilt - the bone-deep conviction that I am flawed, bad, sin-riddled - is a Jewish cliché, one of which I am definitely guilty.

I, personally, must atone for my failings, year after year, acknowledging my patent inability to improve, transcend, get better. My celestial mitzvah scorecard can't be favorable: how many of the 248 positives did I neglect, how many of the negative 365 did I transgress?

The guilt is an expression of my deeply ingrained sense of personal responsibility for myself and what I do. It is the dark underside of my ingrained feeling that I am in fact the prime mover in my life, I have the ability to make things better or worse on my own, with my own skills, talents, temptations and inadequacies.

In this regard, I'm very American. We are the most individualistic people on the planet. Gert Jan Hofstede, a Dutch professor who studies social psychology, found that the USA is the most individualistic of all the countries he has studied. He writes:

In an individualistic society, a person is like an atom in a gas. They can freely float about. And life is an adventure. The best thing you can become is yourself. And in a collectivistic society, a person is like an atom in a crystal. Whether proud or not, whether happy or not, it has a position. And it should stay there.



From "The End of American Meritocracy by the Financial Times, 2016

We are devoted to [the myth of] meritocracy, we drink in a faith from birth that we are each of us the center of the universe, each an active agent molding her own destiny, independent and self-reliant. What I do well is my own victory, what I do poorly is my own failure. And individualism has brought us many good things. A belief in the capacity for one person to change the world is beautiful, an improvement in the state of mankind, leading to longer, happier lives for many human beings on this planet. It just feels good to believe - rightly or wrongly - that we alone can make our lives, and the lives of others, better through our own efforts and skills.

I remind myself that it wasn't always or everywhere this way. Maybe it was easier to be Jewish back when we had the *bais hamikdash*: the gemara describes a process of redemption where repentance barely figures in. Just show up at the temple and wait for news that the goat had shattered on Azazel. Yoma 67a:

[the goat] went rolling and falling down: he did not reach halfway down the mountain before he came apart limb from limb.

Then: we were all forgiven. No day-long davening, no hands beating heart. All clear till next year.



"Scapegoat" From Cruciformcoc.com

The Azazel goat comes up in the *avodah* section of the Yom Kippur *mussaf* davening, an ancient paean to the temple service set in loving, lengthy acrostics: the weepy prepping of the high priest prior to the fast, bulls and sheep parading before him; the day itself, a frenzied blur of bathing, drying, slaughtering, blood-stirring, incense burning, blood sprinkling, and torah reading, with a few *viduyim* thrown in. Then: a big party! The Jews in this telling barely make an appearance, an undifferentiated mass, an audience, passive: we speak with one voice or we are silent. Our roles, as Prof. Hofstede would say, were crystallized: we were still, fixed, ministered to, without agency.

While our clergy remind us of the *avodah's* primacy, many experience it as a blizzard of text we buzz through mostly in silence: we kneel on our paper towels, foreheads to the floor [doesn't it feel so . . . Muslim?], then hop up and sing-song the blood spritzing, and then again and again. What was the holiest ritual of the Jewish year can today be a time for some to stretch, to yawn, to take a break.

My guilt is better expressed in the *viduyim*, but they are careful to mitigate, distance, soften the blow. They aren't about *me*; they keep us as a group, undifferentiated. Not only is the language of the *viduyim* resolutely plural - "*ashamNU*, *bagadNU*," etc; or "*Al Chet She'chataNU* . . ." - it is also remarkably vague, listing more general character flaws than specific sins according to the 613 tally: "for the sin of haughty eyes, . . . for the sins we committed without knowing. . .". And tellingly, we all recite the full roster of *viduyim* no matter our own flaws, no customization

invited or allowed. So why should I personally feel so guilty: I didn't even commit [most of] those sins!

But oh, the *unsaneh tokef*: written in Medieval Mitteleuropa, a limbless, martyred rabbi composing the prayer with dying breaths: heady stuff. And it is vividly, intimately personal:

You [G-d] will open the book of remembrances, and from it You will read. And the signature of every person is there. . . . And all the inhabitants of the earth will pass before You like sheep; like a shepherd passing his sheep under his staff, so shall You pass and count and calculate and consider the soul of every living thing, and slice off a destiny for all of your creations, and write their judgments."

So fate is like salami: a nice thick chunk means I get a long and happy life, while a thin sliver bodes unspeakable torment. I can feel the prod of the shepherd's staff on my back as we are counted, one by one. The professor's free gas atoms pay the price for their frolic, destiny literally measured with a knife to reflect our personal merit.

And is there hope? Can I appeal to the shattered goat tumbling down the hill to save me? No such luck.

But repentance, prayer and charity mute the severity of the decree.

It is up to me, individually, to soften - not avoid - the blow. I am solely responsible for my success or failure, for my life. No ritual slaughter, no sprinkling of blood on the curtain, no dismembered goat can help me. No wonder this evocation is found to be so central to our High Holiday ritual: its dramatic poetry vividly jibes with our deeply felt sense of personal autonomy and attendant guilt.

Judaism seeks, I think, to balance my sense of individual agency with a view of me as part of a collective: Rav Soloveitchik taught that the *Yom Kippur* service demanded of us a dual perspective, held in mind simultaneously, embracing the paradox that we are - each of us - both the apex of creation, a unique reflection of divine light, and at the very same moment we are like ants underfoot, like ash and dust: innumerable, valueless, evanescent, anonymous.

But I would suggest that we have skewed this balance and shaped our Judaism to favor our individualist bias. We suppress, deny, and explain away the strangeness, the raw, alien qualities that comprise the differences between Judaism as it was practiced in the times of Herod or Rashi or the Baal Shem Tov from how we practice it today. The religion was in its centralized temple service the epitome of a communal experience; in later generations the more collectivist culture of Medieval Spain or 18th Century Ukraine colored our way of worshipping. The individual was valued more through her association with the group, caste, family, faith, country. Standing out, being "special," was dangerous, a threat to the wellbeing of the whole.

I remember when I was in high school and spent time with a rabbi whom I revered. At his table on Shabbat evenings I felt compelled to be the quiet helper, to channel my identity through

service to him, to find comfort and strength through melding with the group. It was a good feeling. In a life devoted to striving for self-identification, for excelling competitively - in work, in school, at home, at play - the experience of finding purpose and fulfillment through a suppression of my individuality was in a very weird way exhilarating. I was glad to not be different, to conform, to blend in, to be identified not as a standout but as part of the background.

I imagine this is the feeling of the *chassid* at the *tisch*, swaying with the crowd like a wave, packed in tight amongst people of nearly identical beliefs, dress, practice, habit, language, and culture. The feeling of being at a rock concert, shouting lyrics in unison at the top of your lungs, unable to hear yourself over the roar of the crowd, it is probably the same at a rally or a rave or a riot, too.



"Mosh Pit" From Wikipedia

We believe that the Torah's commandments are edicts to be followed strictly, meticulously - even when they rub us the wrong way or when we find them opaque or empty or even objectionable. We can't just abandon the laws we don't like. A *bareita* cited a little down the same page of *Yoma* 67b distills it nicely:

"And you shall keep my statutes" [Lev. 18:4], there are things that Satan challenges: eating pork; wearing shatnes; halitza for a widow; the purification of a leper; and the Yom Kippur scapegoat. And if you say "these are meaningless acts," the text responds: "I am the Lord" (Lev 18:4): I am the Lord: I decreed these [illogical commandments] and you have no right to doubt them.

We, in the end, cannot take the satan's side and dismiss these rules, no matter how silly or remote or anathema we find them. G-d commanded us to follow them, knowing that they were without reason, because they were without reason. Our challenge is to let go of the need to always understand before we do, to recognize that our perspective is not omniscient, to jump headlong on the hope that our tradition, our faith, and the modesty we are called upon to possess will see us through.

Maybe mitzvot in general are themselves an exercise in practising the suppression of the individual impulse. Acting virtuously is its own reward. We feel good about ourselves, we are using our agency to express ourselves as good people. But we are commanded to respect our parents, to fence our roofs, to lift the burden from a stumbling animal not because these are good and moral things to do, but solely because G-d told us to do so. Satan's distinction is a mistake: *shatnes* is no different than charity.

Hence Torah Lishmah.

Doing mitzvot lishmah means giving up the satisfaction gained from doing the Right Thing. I do it Lishmah, for His name, not for my own. I should get the same benefit from donning *tefillin* as I do from helping the poor. And conversely, I aim to experience in helping the poor a level of spiritual devotion and submission to Higher Authority as I would in praying sincerely and listening to the *shofar* at *neilah*.

So as I prepare for the Days of Awe I will try this year to let go of my guilt a little bit - something I do every year, to little effect. This year, I will try to do it not only by reducing the feelings of ownership of my failings, but also by trying to see myself as deriving strength from my membership in a community of faith, by letting my soul fall back, trusting, eyes closed, into the mosh pit of our tradition and our Bayit community, and our people across time and across the globe.



Yehuda Amichai, "The Real Hero of the Akedah"

By Rabbi Dr. Wendy Zierler

The real hero of the Binding of Isaac was the ram,
who didn't know about the conspiracy of the others.
He was proffered to die instead of Isaac.

I want to sing a memorial song about him—
about his curly wool and his human eyes,
about the horns that were so silent on his living head,
that they made into shofars after he was slaughtered
to blare their battle cries
or to hoot their obscene joy.

I want to remember the final picture
like a photo in a sophisticated fashion magazine:
the young man tanned and coddled in his fancy suit
and beside him the angel, in a long silk gown,
dressed for a festive reception,
both of them looking with empty eyes
at two empty places,
and behind them, like a colored backdrop, the ram,
caught in the thicket before the slaughter,
the thicket, his last friend.

The angel went home.

Isaac went home.

Abraham and God went long ago.

But the real hero of the Binding of Isaac
is the ram.

הגבור האמיתי של העקדה

הגבור האמיתי של העקדה היה האיל
שלא ידע על הקנוניה בין האחרים.
הוא כמו התנדב למות במקום יצחק.
אני רוצה לשיר עליו שיר זכרון,
על הצמר המתלול ועל עיניו האנושיות
על הקרניים שהיו שקטות כל כך בראשו הקי
ואחר שנשחט עשו מהן שופרות
לקול תרועת מלחמתם
או לקול תרועת שמחתם הנסה.

אני רוצה לזכור את התמונה האחרונה
כמו תצלום יפה בעתון אפנה מעדן:
הצעיר השזוף והמפנק בבגדיו המגנדרים
ולידו המלאך הלבוש שמלת משי ארבה
לשקלת פנים חגיגית.
ושניהם בעיניים ריקות
מביטים אל שני מקומות ריקים

ומאחוריהם, ברקע צבעוני, האיל
נאחז בסבך בטרם שחיטה.
והסבך ידידו האחרון.

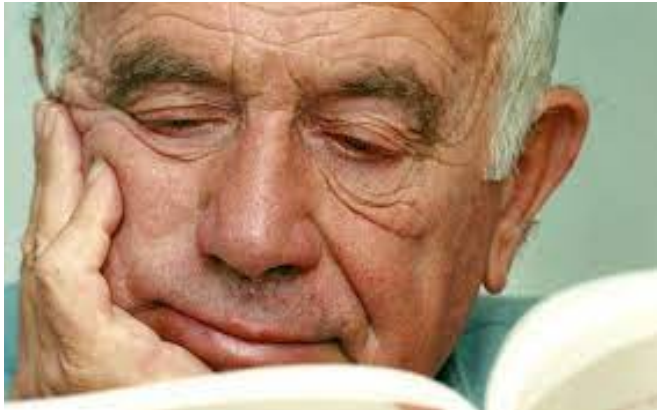
המלאך הלך הביתה
יצחק הלך הביתה
ואברהם ואלהים הלכו מזמן.

אבל הגבור האמיתי של העקדה
הוא האיל.

No biblical story has occupied Hebrew poets more than the story of the Akedah. Given the centrality of the Akedah in the Rosh Hashanah liturgy, and the way it is invoked as evidence of *zekhut avot*, it is worth considering how the Akedah has been reconsidered in modern Hebrew poetry, most notably Yehuda Amichai's "Hagibbor ha'amiti shel ha'akedah" (1983).

The word “emet” is an important one in our High Holiday liturgy, given its appearance on the list of the Thirteen Attributes of God. God is presented during the High Holidays to us as a God of Truth. The Gemarah in Sanhedrin 110b tells the story of Korah’s assembly, who upon being punished and swallowed up by the earth, repent and pronounce from the underworld “Moses is truth and his Torah is truth.”

Amichai’s poem, however, subjects the Akedah, at least our received or conventional understandings of the story, to scrutiny in terms of its truth claims. If the conventional liturgical



Yehudah Amichai, from Times of Israel

reading of the story sees Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son, and Isaac’s willingness to be sacrificed, as indicative of special merit or heroism, Amichai presents an alternative view.

To him, the story is one of *kenunyah* – of conspiracy or collusion between Abraham, God, Isaac and the angel, each of them playing a role, like movie actors, in a pre-written script that serves their own self-interests, all of them, in effect, plotting against the innocent, unsuspecting ram.

Rather than upholding the heroism of Abraham or Isaac, as so much medieval Hebrew poetry does, Amichai raises up the innocent faithfulness of the ram. One cannot help but think of the habit in Christianity of referring to Jesus as the lamb, who agreed to be sacrificed on the cross. But whereas Jesus was presented as having self-consciousness about his self-sacrifice, the ram is an unwitting victim of other people’s arrangements. The poem intimates that Abraham might have known all along that God was never really going to make him go through with the sacrifice, and Isaac, too, with all of them acting out a kind of ritual of sacrificial substitution, one that will later get enshrined in the Temple cult. And even if Abraham and Isaac didn’t know that this substitution was inevitable, the fact is that at the end of the story, they and the angel all leave the scene of the story alive, whereas the ram never “goes home.” Not just that: the original violence against him is recapitulated over and over again in the shearing of the ram’s horns, to fashion *shofarot* that herald violent wars.

What does it mean to say that the real or true hero of the story is the ram? How does this reshape our definition of the word “gibbor” (which is linked etymologically to *gever*--man) and of the experience of blowing or hearing the shofar? Insofar as in our thrice daily Amidah prayer opens with praise of the (masculine) God as a *gibbor le’olam*, Amichai’s raising up of the animal ram as the *gibbor ha’amiti* would seem to constitute arch heresy. Add to this the poem’s contention that God, like Abraham (and like Isaac and the angel) went away long ago, suggesting the absence of a divine presence in our contemporary world. The only character in the play left on stage, as Amichai sees it, is the wooly ram.

One way to understand the poem is within the context of a Hebrew literary tradition that remains textually bound to the story of the Akedah, returning to it over and over again as a way of processing the legacy of Jewish persecution, suffering, and the modern Israeli experience of the compulsory draft, where every family is compelled to send their children off to the army. To be bound up with the Akedah, in this context, is to participate in a collective myth and collectivist



Alamy Stock Photo

institutions that continually demand personal sacrifice.

To be allied with the ram, however, is also to be a creature of the “*sevakh*” (the thicket) and the *mesubakh* (the complex), someone who lives not in a reductionist state of ideological simplification but with a fully painful awareness of the complexity of human existence. I recently listened to a fascinating podcast discussion between Ezra Klein of the *NY Times* and Christian thinker and technology critic, L.M. Sacacas, recent author of a list of 41 questions we should ask of the technologies and tools that shape our lives. At one point the discussion turned to the issue of online profiles and how they flatten or predetermine our sense of a person.

Sacacas noted that “each of us are such complex realities, such a tangle of desires, emotions, insecurities, and capacities, and capabilities, and histories, and narratives.” Any attempt, of course, to capture that in an online profile is necessarily going to leave something important out. In Amichai’s depiction, Isaac and the angel are flattened, online profile creatures, less than fully human. The ram, however, has human eyes, curly hair and curved horns. He is round and complicated. The shofar, in this sense, is no mere war instrument, but a complex tool, one that can herald violence, but also mark redemption (as in the Jubilee year) or introspection, in the case of the High Holidays.

Poetry, I’d like to think, is the genre of the ram and the *sevakh*. To understand poetry, one must enter into the thicket of figurative language, to experience beauty and sadness all at once, to tangle up experiences in the form of metaphor and paradox. Everyone else in the story, as Amichai depicts it, fades away, but the ram’s friend, the thicket, abides. And therein, one might argue, is the true, heroic spirit of Elul and the High holidays: agreeing to entangle oneself in the project of introspection, complexity, and spiritual as well as social engagement, to believe in the idea of knotty, complex, fully rounded, and ever-evolving human spiritual profile and possibilities of humankind.

Atoning in the Year Ahead

By Aaron Stayman

Every year, I feel like I have so much to atone for (the Machzor makes that feeling natural with so many suggestions for the way I've done wrong). Sins aside, I also have my own goals and hopes for the year ahead, with the prevailing hope being that despite these sins, I will make it into the book of life. I think the concepts of atoning and making plans for the year ahead are intertwined-I'll think ahead at Rosh Hashanah and discuss new year's resolutions with my family, and I'll finish my atonement at Yom Kippur as a way of wrapping up the year behind me. After that it's the festivities through the rest of Tishrei, and by and large we forget about the Book of Life business for the majority of the year, and are not forced to reckon with feeling bad about ourselves with few exceptions, like Tisha b'av or when our mothers try to force feed us a third Pesach kugel hours before the end of the holiday and we say "no".

Atonement, though, is so much of what I look forward to focusing my year ahead on. This past year, without being overtly partisan (though perhaps a little political in my targeted actions), I made an effort to do better by people currently incarcerated-you can see me at a protest for parole reform on a local news story, and if you ran into me at the Farmer's market for much of the spring or

talked to me on street corners as I canvassed for the city council race, prison (and jail) reform were key issues to me. I enjoyed partnering with my friends at RAPP (Release Aging People in Prisons) on Sundays guide my fellow neighborhood residents to learn more about aging prisoners and reforms we could make to give them a second chance in life.



Dreamstime

Atonement and sin come in so many forms, but we can see when davening on Yom Kippur that "we" have sinned, as per the verbiage in the machzor. We do not use "I" phrases, but communal ones ("we") to indicate that we all must atone for the sins of the past year together. We as a community cannot be made ready for the new year until we have collectively

reckoned with these sins and prayed collectively for entry into the book of life—we do not have an option in the machzor to recite “I haven’t sinned through interest and extortion, but [insert name here of fellow community member] has.” We all own these mistakes and we together must reckon with what forgiveness looks like.

So, too, in criminal justice, must we recognize that mistakes can compound and affect more than the sinner. We must all reckon with crimes in our communities—in the macro level we must consider what ways can prevent these crimes, what is the justice that can best follow, and what, perhaps most importantly, makes a community feel safe? And at a more targeted level, we can pursue a law change that seemed so close this year but didn’t come to be in New York: Parole reform. We must continue thinking about the justice that comes after a sentence, after a



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punishment, after the acknowledgement of a sin. Do we need to be keeping elderly people in prison, where living conditions are already difficult and currently are being worsened by a pandemic? Do we acknowledge that people can in fact age out of crime, and that someone who has served decades behind bars with good behavior deserves a parole hearing? Do we believe that people deserve second chances?

It is not my place to tell you the answers to these questions (though anyone who knows me and/or has read the above paragraphs can make some educated guesses to my stances), but we must reckon with these questions at our moment of atonement. If we can be forgiven, who cannot be, and why? Is our confession and prayed forgiveness what we would wish on others? I hope to challenge the assumptions I’ve carried with me on this topic in the year ahead, and hope you’ll join me. Together, we have sinned, and I pray for a better book of life for all in our community.

Elul and Teshuvah

By Rick Feldman

Great is Teshuvah because it brings healing to the world.... Great is Teshuvah because it brings closer redemption.... Great is Teshuvah because through an individual who does Teshuvah, the whole world may be forgiven.” Talmud Yoma, 86a-b.

Elul , the month of preparation for the Jewish New Year, started abruptly this year when on the very first day I was greeted first thing in the morning with a news report on the radio from the **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change** at the United Nations that stated: **human impact is "unequivocally" the cause of the warming of the atmosphere, land and sea.** At that time I decided to dedicate my teshuvah to a better understanding of my personal foot print on that land and sea. Now, In a very few days, on Elul 27, our tradition teaches that on the third day of creation " G-d said: "Let the waters beneath the heavens be gathered into one place, and let the dryness be visible'. It was so. G-d named the dryness 'earth' And the gathering of the waters He named the 'seas'. So now I find myself scrambling to figure out how to measure my contribution to this global warming, and then identify practical ways to diminish my engagement in this process.` Please permit me to share with you a few of my considerations

I decided to start by taking general inventory of my environment and interactions: **Home environment:** I live in the Skyview apts. They have recently received an energy efficiency rating of an A. That's good! I always thought that Skyview, being on one of the highest points on the Eastern Seaboard, would be an environmental disaster! I also make an effort to only use the air conditioner on rare occasion, use the microwave and dishwasher occasionally, and our laundry machines are highly energy efficient. **Automobile:** I drive a 2017 Ford Fusion hybrid car which reportedly gets 42 combined highway/city miles/gallon of gasoline, which compares with a gas driven model that gets 23 combined highway/city miles/ gallon of gasoline. **Food:** I have a varied diet, which is mostly plant based. I eat red meat very occasionally, chicken and fish a few times a week, and the rest is mostly plant based. However, I probably could focus on eating more locally produced and seasonally appropriate fruits and vegetables. **Organizational contact:** I am not attending a lot of theater or venues that require a lot of energy, and I am staying out of stores these days, so that is good for my personal carbon footprint. **Travel:** Covid has kept me pretty much grounded in the last year and a half. So most of my travel has been to the Catskills and back which is really good for my carbon foot print! However, I do plan to travel more, once Covid is under control, so that will have a big effect on my ecological footprint, as noted in an article **To Fly or Not to Fly the Environmental Cost of Air Travel** one is warned *"Even a serious environmentalist who eats vegan, heats using solar power and rides a bike to work, but who still take the occasional flight, wouldn't look very green at all."*

Given this general inventory I went on line and discovered a number of **Carbon Footprint Calculators** to help me to quantify this information. I looked at the [EPA Carbon Footprint Calculator](#) , but it seemed a little too dry, so I decided to compare myself against a scale called [How Many Earths Would It Take For Everyone To Live Like Me Footprint Calculator](#). **After twenty minutes of narrowing in on my lifestyle choice the results told me that for everyone to live like me it would take 2.5 planet Earths!**

Wow! Since I like to think of my lifestyle as pretty modest, this rating does make me appreciate the extent of my privilege. So then I thought it would be good to review some of my behaviors and see if there were ways that I could easily cut back on my carbon footprint. [10 Ways to Cut Your Carbon Footprint](#). This is a very accessible site, even if it does come from Scotland, and I recommend it because it has ten categories that are easily understood and can lead to immediate success. The categories are: 1. [Eating with the seasons](#) 2. [Carbon-clever travelling](#) 3. [Source Organic](#) 4. [Energy-saving in the house](#) 5. [Renewable Energy](#) 6. [Less but better meat](#) 7. [The 5 R](#) 8. [Sustainable Fashion](#) 9. [Zero-Waste](#) 10. [Understand your personal footprint](#)

For example, today I went to the supermarket and I had to make some choices, and after a little comparison shopping I bought the tomato sauce from New Jersey rather than Italy; snacks from Connecticut instead of Colorado and New York grown peaches and apples instead of the cherries from Washington and grapes from California. And I felt good too because I know that when I change my patterns in one area consistently over time it will help me to change other patterns as well.

Now we all know that it will take major corporate, institutional and government changes across a global stage if we are going to come out of the first half of twenty-first century with any meaningful changes to global warming, but to say that each of us can not make a difference is to say that we can not play a part in determining our destiny. If that were the case why bother working to improve ourselves during this season of personal transformation?

Fortunately, I am not alone in this point of view. In an article from 2008: [Not Eco-Teshuvah: Just Teshuvah](#), Rabbi Julian Sinclair says: *"In Judaism, individual responsibility is the fundamental unit of social change. Teshuvah starts with me and you, (as my friend Jess Gold in England points out.) "Great is Teshuvah, because through a single person repenting, the whole world may be forgiven," says the Talmud (Yoma 86b). This is the redemptive flip side of interconnectedness; the deep, sincere transformation of one person can change the world."*

And I am also in good company at **HIR** in this attempt at making it part of my spiritual journey to repair the damage I have participated in and making my human environment less of a burden on our shared planet by resolving to act with more intentionality and kindness. We only have to look at the commitment of our **Green Team** to improve our building's energy efficiency to be inspired to our own changes, or to the history of **HIR** going back at least to 2014 when we were one of a small handful of Orthodox Synagogues that signed on to the **Climate Change March** in New York City that took place in that year just before Rosh Hashanah. When our then Rabbi Ari Hart led the way with his public comments: *"The Orthodox community needs to show leadership to the world that we take seriously the Torah's command to protect the earth". (Might*

it be time again for our rabinnical and lay leadership to align our spiritual community with others who are working together to bring a unified voice to repairing our earth?)

Finally, as part of my process of repair I am making at least some charitable donations in this season of return to those who are fighting for these issues in our country such as Hazon <https://donate.hazon.org/give/275350/#!/donation/checkout> and Uri L'Tzedek <http://utzedek.org/donate/>. I am also continuing to educate myself concerning environmental learning and torah teachings at <http://canfeinesharim.org/>. And I am going to spend some time exploring the connection of environmental justice and the Shmitta year beginning with a zoom program at 4 pm on Sunday, September 19, presented by Bruce Spierer, Public Education Manager at Hazon, and sponsored by Rochester Area Interfaith Climate Action on the question: **How could the Biblical commands of Shimitta inform our environmental and social justice practices today?** To join us click this link: <https://forms.gle/5X1jLkEqFLzUXJdt9>

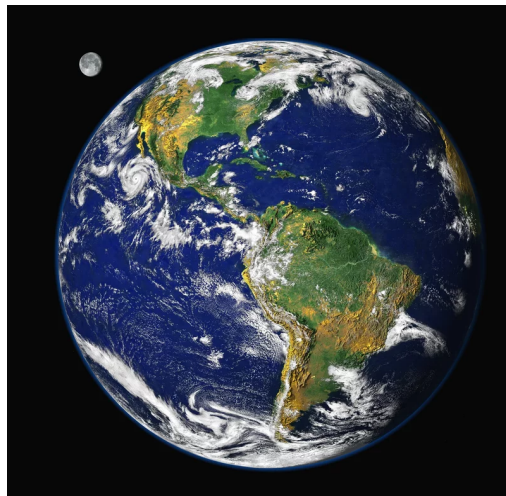


Photo of Earth, by Reto Stockli from visibleearth.nasa.gov

Shabbat Shabbaton and Yom Aruchta

By Bernard Smith

Yom Kippur called Shabbat Shabbaton or, the shabbat of shabbatot and the two day festival, even in Israel, of Rosh Hashanah is called yom aruchta or one long day. Why?

In chutz la'aretz (the diaspora) we are blind to the make up of the calendar as envisaged by the Torah. For us Pesach (Passover) has 8 days, two days at the start where many kinds of work as defined by the Torah are forbidden, and two days at the end where the same kinds of work are forbidden. Shavuot (Pentecost), is a two day festival where both days are considered holy and the same restrictions apply as they do on Passover. Succot (Tabernacles) has two days at the beginning of the festival where work is forbidden and two days at the end where the same restrictions hold.

But In Israel, the festivals appear quite differently. Pesach is a seven day festival with the first and last day viewed as holy and so work is restricted. Shavuot is a one day festival and that one day is holy and so work is restricted, and Succot is a second seven day festival with the first and the last days holy and so we are forbidden from doing work.

Let's look at all the days viewed as holy:

Pesach has two

Shavuot has one

Succot has two

That's five.

Rosh Hashana has two but in the language of the Rabbis these two days are to be viewed as one very long day. So that is six.

Yom Kippur is one day of extreme holiness when some of us wear white and we are asked to view ourselves like the malachim, the angels as our focus



Ashkenazi Calendar from Palestine 1911 from ynetnews.com

is to the G-dliness of our existence, even to the point of eschewing food and drink*. And so that is seven.

In other words, as everyone knows, our week is made up of seven days where six days are mundane and the seventh, Shabbat is holy and the Torah asks us to avoid 39 kinds of work.

But our calendar is essentially constructed in an identical manner.

It consists of seven holy festive days, where six are holy at a lower level. While we are restricted from engaging in many of the 39 kinds of work the Rabbis understand from the Torah, unlike shabbat, we are nevertheless not prohibited from carrying even in a place with no eruv**) and we may cook food and use an existing flame to light a fire or a candle. The seventh holy day is the shabbat of the year, the shabbat shabbaton, the most holy day of the year where not only are the 39 kinds of work prohibited but even eating and drinking are forbidden.

*Jewish law makes exceptions for those who are sick, new mothers and women in labor, and minors but you should discuss any questions with the Rabbinical staff

** An eruv is symbolic boundary that encloses a public space transforming it into a space that links each person's home within that boundary in such a way that they may carry items from within their home outside and bring items outside into their home or the home of another.

Jamaican Jewish Calendar from 1798,
from ynetnews.com

JAMAICA ALMANACK. 13			
K A L E N D A R			
of MONTHS, SABBATHS, and HOLIDAYS, which the HE BREWS or JEWS observe and keep, for the Years 5558 and 5559 of the CREATION.			
EVERY Sabbath throughout the Year.			
רח שבט	Month Sebat, Thursday,	-	January 18
רח אדר	Month Adar, Friday, Saturday,	-	Feb. 16, 17
יום אסתר	Fest of Esther, Thursday,	-	March 1
פורים	Purim, Friday and Saturday,	-	2, 3
רח ניסן	Month Nisan, Sunday,	-	18
פסח	Pasover, Sunday, Monday,	-	April 1, 2
רח אייר	Month Iyar, Monday, Tuesday,	-	16, 17
לג לעומר	33 Omer, Friday,	-	May 4
רח סיון	Month Sivan, Wednesday,	-	16
שבועות	Sebuoth, Monday, Tuesday,	-	21, 22
רח תמוז	Month Tamuz, Thursday, Friday,	-	June 14, 15
יום תמוז	Fest Tamuz, Sunday,	-	July 1
רח אב	Month Ab, Saturday,	-	14
תשעה באב	Ninth Ab, Sunday,	-	22
רח אלול	Month Elul, Sunday, Monday,	-	August 12, 13
5559.			
אשנח-שר	Month Tifri, Tuesday, Wednesf.	-	Sept. 11, 12
יום גדליה	Fest Guedalya, Thursday,	-	13
כפור	Kipur, Thursday,	-	20
סוכות	Tabernacles, Tuesday, Wednesday,	-	25, 26
הושענה רבא	Hosabana Raba, &c. Mond. Tuesf.	-	
	Wednesday,	-	Oct. 1, 2, 3
רח חשוון	Month Hefwan, Wednesf. Thursday,	-	10, 11
רח כסליו	Month Kisliue, Friday,	-	November 9
חנוכה	Maccabeus, Monday,	-	December 3
	Barach Aleno,	-	3
רח טבת	Month Tebeth, Saturday, Sunday,	-	8, 9
יוםמשה	Fest Tebeth, Tuesday,	-	18
B 2			

HaYom Harat Olam: We Are the World's Foster Parents

By Elliott Rabin

Hayom harat olam are the familiar opening words of a beloved short piyyut, a liturgical poem, recited three times in the repetition of the Rosh Hashanah Musaf prayer. There are two main conundrums that this piyyut raises: 1. What is the meaning of these opening words? 2. What is their connection to the rest of the piyyut, about God's judgment of us?

1. The opening words are nearly always translated "Today is the birth of the world." The notion that Rosh Hashanah is the time when the world began accords well with our sense of the holiday. Rosh Hashanah marks the conclusion of the previous year and its transition into the new one. On this day, the ledger book is opened, the deeds from the previous year are recorded; for the next ten days, those deeds are weighed in a scale, we still have a chance to adjust the weights with our deeds, and on Yom Kippur, the final balance is measured. From then on, the world begins anew, our lives are refreshed, and the valence of our deeds is measured from scratch.

The problem is, the word *harah* means *conceive*, *become pregnant*, not *give birth* (which would be *leidah*). The words thus mean, "Today is the conception of the world." This phrasing appears to hearken to a disagreement in the Talmud between Rabbis Eliezer and Yehoshua (Rosh Hashanah 10b-11b) about whether the world was created in Tishrei or Nisan. If the world was conceived in Tishrei, it emerged in Nisan, in time for Passover.

The notion that the world underwent a period of gestation as it took shape renders the Earth as not only the habitation of life but as a creature itself alive. It also suggests, without fully stating it (for fear of the anthropological and heretical possibilities), that God is the world's Mother. God carried the Earth from conception in Tishrei to birth in Nisan. With the creation of humanity, God entrusted the world to people's



Jan Van Eyck, Arnolfini Portrait, Smarthistory.com

care. Our mandate is to serve as the Earth's foster parents, to raise and protect the world that God created through a process as intimate, endowed with God's own Being, as the process of birth itself.

2. Right after the announcement of today as the day of the world's birth or conception, why does the piyyut jump right to the theme of judgment: היום יעמיד במשפט כל יצורי עולמים, "This day stands all the world's creations up in judgment"? The usual answer is the one I gave above: as the commemoration of the birth of the world, today we mark the end of the old year and the birth of the new one. According to our tradition, the process of that transition, the human role in moving the world forward toward regeneration, is through reflection upon and repair of our ethical lives and relationships. Only when we have worked to make ourselves more whole can we usher in a new world, a world renewed.

I would like to propose another reading, in line with my thoughts here of humans as custodians of the world, God's child. The piyyut aligns two ideas about Rosh Hashanah, as a time of judgment, drawn out so movingly in the prayer *Unetaneh Tokef*, and a time of creation. The connection is drawn in the beginning of the poem, as the word *olam*, world, is repeated twice—literally, This day brings to judgment all of the *world's* creatures. As creatures *of* the world, we are judged for our treatment of that very world, teeming with life and a living testament to God's birthing forth of the universe. The world of life can be restored anew only if people, granted supreme, God-like powers above all other creatures, can correct our much abused relationship with the planet and regard it with the reverence due to it as God's intimate, Godly creation.

This summer, a number of stark events have made us aware that the Earth as a living organism, as God's child, is in grave peril. The climate crisis is sharply increasing along multiple paths. Extreme heat waves, even in places with weather that is supposed to be mild or cold (Denver, Siberia) witnessed nightmarish temperatures, sparking weekslong forest fires devastating vast tracts of land. Extended droughts are threatening crucial water supplies and the long-term viability of human habitation in Western states. Towns across Europe and Malaysia experienced catastrophic flooding. Hot weather caused mass extinctions on land and sea: estimates of more than a billion sea creatures perished off of California and Florida, salmon and other fish vanished from some Western rivers, thousands of flamingos died in Turkey. And we know that these trends, which have been accelerating in recent years, will only get worse in the years ahead. For example, it is estimated that upwards of a million species, and as many as 60% of the millions of life forms, may become extinct by the end of this century.

In August, the latest report from the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change), the leading scientific agency reporting on the effects of the climate crisis around the world, said that the crisis has now reached "code red." Some impacts, such as the melting of the ice caps, are now considered irreversible, meaning that, in the coming decades and centuries, coastal settlements such as New York City will become uninhabitable from rising sea levels. The report does offer some hope: if people can rapidly stop emitting greenhouse gases—first and foremost carbon dioxide from gas and oil, as well as methane from oil production/pipelines and cows—then we have a chance of holding the global increase in temperatures to 1.5C and eventually cooling back the planet. This requires a level of coordinated action by governments, businesses and individuals that has never been seen before, along with the will to achieve these necessary aims.

This day, we are held in judgment. God gave birth to the world; we must not let it die on our watch. This year, we must take these words to heart and ensure that this beautiful birthling that sustains us—this great gift from God, the Earth—endures. For the sake of our children, our people and all people, and all living beings. Our calling is nothing less, as Jews, as humans, as creatures of God.



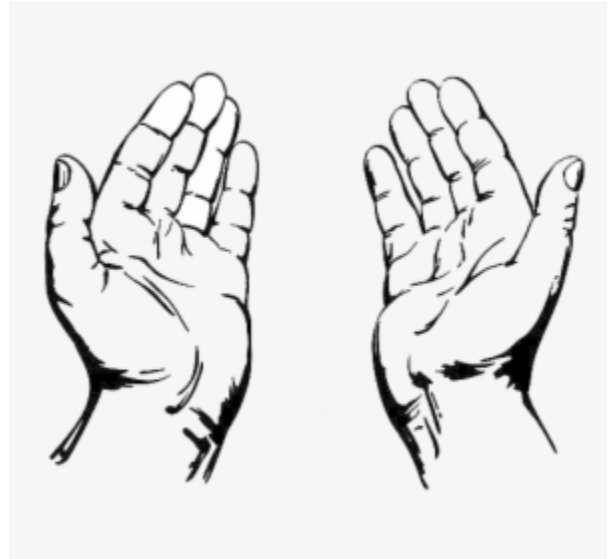
Carla Golembe, Mantras from FineArtAmerica.com

Partnering with the Creator

By Rabbi Bob Kaplan

There is a Sephardic Minhag that when one recites *Ashrei* you open your palms and lift them upward, in acceptance and connection, towards heaven when we recite "*Pote'ach Et Yadecha U'Masbia Le'Chol Chai Ratzon*" (You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing) its essential core of connection to the *ratzon* (will) of our Creator.

One of the traditional explanations for this minhag is that by extending your palms upwards one accentuates the power of their prayer by taking a physical action. In addition, this physical action of upturned palms is symbolic of accepting the Creator's grace and sustaining power with a full heart, deep gratitude and an open hand. Therefore, not only are we enjoined to turn our mind, our *kavanah*, to this moment of acceptance of the Creator's grace, we are encouraged to engage our corporal self in an act of connecting this concept of spiritual grace to the physical world we are living and engaging in. Our *Neshama* (Soul) and *Guf* (Body) are blended into a harmony of consciousness and acceptance.



Kindpng.com

This transformative moment of combining the spiritual with the physical is so powerful an act that in the early 20th Century Rav Eliezer Waldenberg, the Tzitz *Eliezer*, formally accepted this minhag and recommended that others on the Ashkenazi tradition accept it too.

In his explanation of why he accepted this minhag was his understanding that action strengthens our prayers, yet he went a step further. He noted that that action following prayer, such as when Moshe raised his hands after prayer when confronting the Amalekites or when *Sholomo HaMelech*, King Solomon, inaugurated the Temple, he raised his hands to heaven after his prayers, as a pathway of connecting the physical with the spiritual.

It is action combined with prayer that brings the harmony of grace and sustenance. We are not to become just idle receivers of G-d's grace, more so, we are blessed with the obligation and responsibility of becoming active partners in invoking and bringing the Creator's grace and sustenance into the world we live and journey through. This harmony of prayer and action brings us to a place where we can become more spiritually and physically attuned to not only the *ratzon* of the creator regarding our needs, we become more open and connected to the needs of the other and how we are partners with our common Creator can become part of the process of meeting those needs.

Mystically it is understood an action below invokes and predicates action above. Our active participation in bringing to all humanity what is needed, as a partner with the Creator, allows for all aspects of life's needs, from food to housing to health to justice and equity, to all be properly met. The actualization of justice and sustenance for all is not meant to be miraculous, solely the

responsibility of the Creator. This fulfillment of the *ratzon* of the Creator is meant to be a norm, expected, made possible with our active partnership with the Creator. In the physical world we live in to meet all the needs of creation and those we share this creation with is only actualized in its fullness by being an active and accepting partner with G-d. By opening ourselves to this *ratzon* with open palms, and open hearts and minds we become the physical partners and instruments of G-d's grace.

As we lift our hands and voice in prayer during this season of hope and forgiveness let us open our hearts, minds and beings to becoming partners with the Creator to be attuned to and part of the process of meeting the needs the needs of all humankind according to the Creator's will.

Be The Tikkun to Hate



Who Came Up with Tikkun Olam? From Chabad.org

rising

'rising' was first published in *Muddy River Poetry Review*.

By Pinny Bulman

before the syringe dropbox was put up
as a mezuzah at the park's entrance
protecting the rusting car skeletons dotting the landscape
like picked-over carcasses,
this was a forest's edge

and in this spot
where you stubbornly refuse my help to stand
on legs still shaky
a bush once grew where a black bear
foraged for berries
as a doe and her two fawns weaved quietly
through the trees
on their way down to the river

yes, the same river that will one day cover all this
submerging our hubris in heavy silence
refracting our limits under a surface
masquerading as sky

but today the squirrels
are chasing each other among the wildflowers
when you put your tiny hand in mine
and lead me forward
step by shaky step

and as we quietly weave
our way down the slope,
you look up at me as if to say,
the river is rising
let us go to greet it.



From MyJewishLearning.com

tashlich

By Pinny Bulman



we threw our sins
our hidden shames
off the neighboring bridge,
watching as they momentarily settled on the water's surface
before submerging in the erratic
currents pulling them out towards the harbor

they say the river's not as polluted anymore
but i know better
i know what's been thrown
sometimes most of me
decomposing among the bodies
of those who forgot to let go
who lost their ability to shed
like cats out of season
but without the nine lives

at night when
the bridge lights trembled in the sky like floating lanterns shivering
with the autumn wind in a season of fallings
that's when i took her hand
held her close
as we sang each other through the long walk back to
solid ground.

Photo from reimaginingjudaism.org

shofar

By Pinny Bulman

her building had no need for an entrance buzzer
let alone a doorman
the front door easily forced open,
last year's only greeting a confused glance
from a man with urine-soaked pants
slumped against a wall
whispering secrets to the broken floor tiles

but this visit was different
an office desk incongruously planted in the graffitied lobby
where the confused glance now came from
a professional looking woman in uniform

the moment of mutual gawking ended
with the flashing of a federal badge
as she began writing in her notepad
three white males, jewish
one middle-aged, beard, glasses (father)
two teens, look younger than stated age (sons)
dark wrinkled suits, scuffed dress shoes
quarter-sized soup stain on adult's red tie
no IDs
refused to sign entry log (religious reasons)
carrying small bag, inside: one ram's horn(!)
requesting to visit elderly woman, apt. 4J

the agent whispered into a walkie talkie
and waved us on
her gaze following us up the narrow staircase where
i distracted myself counting
the burn marks on the sections of
banister still attached

we found her apartment quickly
its entrance distinguished
by the lack of police tape
and a small mezuzah camouflaged on the doorframe
by a coat of paint
indiscriminately applied years ago

it troubles me that i can no longer picture her
as she lay mute
in that frail, bedbound, final new year
but i can remember her face softening
when my dad spoke to her
in his broken yiddish

and when he lifted
the shofar to his lips
its ancient sound echoed through the dirty hallways
back to a time when human sacrifice
could still be averted
by a voice from above
calling a name.



The Sacrifice of Isaac by Caravaggio, from Wikipedia

The *Egla Arufa*: A Strange Ritual and Our Responsibility for Systemic Violence

By Rabbi Atara Cohen

In this season of reflection and repentance, I have been thinking about the *Egla Arufa*, a case described in the Torah that gets to the heart of communal responsibility. The *Egla Arufa* is an objectively weird ritual. Devarim 21 outlines the curious procedure:



Manuscript From the British Library

1. A murdered corpse is found in the wilderness
2. The Jerusalem high court measures from the corpse to neighboring cities to figure out which city is closest to the body
3. The elders of the closest city bring a heifer to a spring and break the neck of the heifer in the spring
4. The elders of the city wash their hands over the now-dead heifer and make a confession, which goes as follows:

יְדֵינוּ לֹא שָׁפְכוּ אֶת־הַדָּם הַזֶּה וְעֵינֵינוּ לֹא רָאוּ:

“Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see it done.”¹

The ritual is strange for many reasons: why a heifer? Why a spring? What is the point of all this? Rabbinic literature discusses all these questions and raises some more. A mishna at the end of Mesechet Sotah asks:

וְכִי עַל דַּעְתָּנוּ עֲלֵתָהּ, שֶׁזִּקְנֵי בֵּית דִּין שׁוֹפְכֵי דָמִים הֵן?!

And would it really come to our minds that the elders of the court are murderers?²

Why do elders confess if they are not the ones who committed the murder?

The Mishna gives a cryptic answer:³

אֶלָּא שֶׁלֹּא בָּא לְיָדֵינוּ וּפְטָרְנוּהוּ, וְלֹא רָאִינוּהוּ וְהִנַּחְנוּהוּ

¹ Devarim 21:7

² Mishna Sota 9:6

³ Later versions will try to fix the ambiguity, but I’m including the older manuscript version here.

Rather, he did not come to us and we dismissed him, and we did not see him and let him go.⁴

Who is the “he” in the mishna, and why is the court responsible for the murder if they dismiss him or let him go?

The Yerushalmi gives two possible answers:

רבנין דהכא פתרינ קרייא בהורג. ורבנין דתמן פתרינ קרייא בנהרג.
רבנין דהכא פתרינ קרייא בהורג שלא בא על ידינו ופטרנוהו ולא הרגנוהו ולא ראינוהו והנחנוהו ועימעמנו
על דינו.
ורבנין דתמן פתרינ קרייא בנהרג לא בא על ידינו ופטרנוהו בלא הלוייה. ולא ראינוהו והנחנוהו בלא
פרנסה.

The Rabbis here [in Israel] interpret [the mishna] to be speaking about the murderer: We did not let a murderer go free from court and we did not see a murderer and delay justice.

And the Rabbis there [in Babylonia] interpret [the mishna] to be about the murdered person: we did not let them go [into the dangerous wilderness] unescorted and we did not see them and leave them without food [for their journey].⁵

According to the Rabbis of Eretz Yisrael, the “he” in the mishna is the murderer. The court is at fault because they let a person with a track record of violence walk freely in society without warning, ultimately resulting in more violence. According to the Rabbis of Bavel, the “he” in the mishna is the murdered person. The court failed in its responsibility to provide adequate protections for a vulnerable traveler.

Drawing parallels from the Yerushalmi’s analysis to racial violence today is easy. The Rabbis of Eretz Yisrael would argue that those in power are held responsible for the violence done by police with a history of misconduct. The Rabbis of Bavel would argue that those in power are held responsible for not removing the many systemic barriers to the flourishing of people of color. Along these lines, we can imagine the many ways that those who may not have committed physical acts of violence are implicated in the violence around them.

The *Egla Arufa* passage demands that we, like the elders, who may never have enacted violence of any sort, understand that we are implicated in the racial violence that is all too prevalent around us. Just as the members of the court, representatives of the community, are responsible despite not having actually murdered a person, so too we must consider the ways we have the power to fight systemic violence.

The *Egla Arufa* ritual ultimately fails. While the elders do an elaborate ritual to signify that they have done everything possible to prevent violence, violence does persist. We learn later in the mishna that the elders would no longer practice *Egla Arufa* ritual once murder became rampant.⁶ *Egla Arufa* did not succeed in preventing violence. Taking note of one’s culpability does not directly lead to change. Simply feeling guilty does not dismantle systems of oppression. An internal reckoning is only a first step; justice requires external work. Perhaps, we

⁴ Mishna Sotah 9:6

⁵ Talmud Yerushalmi Sotah 9:6

⁶ Mishna Sotah 9:9

can use these days of reflection to brainstorm the ways we can hold ourselves accountable, not just in intellectual theory, but in practice. Our reckoning must be paired with action to enact sustainable change



Who's In Your Village? Tikkun of What Olam?

By Rabbi Brad Hirschfield

Very few people in the circles which most of us travel would say they are opposed to *Tikkun Olam*, and yet that doesn't get us very far in resolving the many competing claims and multiple calls we each receive, especially at this time of year, to participate in *Tikkun Olam*.



There are, by most any caring measure, infinite needs, and each of us has finite resources — be it time, talent or treasure. What to do? To whom *should* we respond? To whom do we *actually* respond? How do we decide?

One way to think about this might be to ask a different sort of question from the ones that are usually proposed when we think about *Tikkun Olam*. Rather than trying to figure out which cause or issue is “most important”, “most urgent”, “most Jewish”, etc, we might ask ourselves which *olam* are we meant to be “*metaken*” — which world are we trying to repair?

“Houses on a Street” From dejavuart.com

You might be saying now, “But Brad, what do you mean by asking us which world? There is only one world, and especially on Rosh Hashanah which celebrates the creation of that world and birth of our shared human ancestors, how can you suggest anything less holistic?”

I would respond that it is not my suggestion, but that of the sages in the Mishnah, in what has become one of the best known teachings among contemporary Jews, and even in the larger world. In fact, as you read the words, I bet you will finish the quote in your head, even before your eyes finish the words.

“Whoever saves a single life, saves an entire world.” So teaches the Mishnah in Sanhedrin 4:9. And far from being rabbinic hyperbole, it is a profound claim about the infinite value of every human being — each one created in the image of God — as we celebrate with the birth of Adam and Chava, whose birthday is Rosh Hashanah.

Each person is an entire world — infinitely valuable, unique and equal, each to the other. When we take this often-invoked teaching to heart, we open the door to asking ourselves which world or worlds we want to heal.

Once we accept the fundamental truth that each person, let alone each community or cause, is a world unto itself — each with its own needs, integrity, and by some measure at least, equal importance — we can look beyond the usual questions we use to organize our efforts to make a difference in the world, and ask the only question that is always there for us to answer: which world do we want heal. In fact, there is no wrong answer to that question, the only failure comes from not asking it and responding as best we can, given who we are.

As much as *Tikkun Olam* is about the world, it is at least as much about us. There is no one world to repair, there are billions of worlds to repair. And all the arguments about priorities, efficiencies and measurable outcomes pretty much vanish in the face of whatever choices we make to have a positive impact in any one of those unique, equal and infinitely valuable worlds we call people and communities.

From the places where we daven, to the places where torah is learned. From literacy programs to Riverdale's own *Friendly Fridge* which feeds whoever cares to take from either of their two locations. From assuring the existence of a safe and secure State of Israel to securing voting access for all eligible voters here in the US.

These are all worlds we can choose to repair, once we set our eyes, our ears our hearts and minds on them. and from the the perspective of each of the respective residents of those discreet worlds, they are the whole world, in very real ways.



From eatingintranslation.com

And if you crave a more halakhic approach, let me share one additional source from Bava Metziah 71a (among other places) — “The poor of your village take priority”. Which invites us to ask, what counts as “our village”? Do poor non-Jews, living right here in our physical neighborhood, come before members of our extended Jewish families, living thousands of miles away? What if one group is more materially in need than the other? What happens if we are confident that others will address one set of needs but not the other?

Different authorities respond in different ways to these and related questions, but all of the answers reflect the answerers’ understanding of to whom they feel most proximate, most connected — that is, who they count as being in their respective villages. So once again, the answer is less about the one right answer, and more about the one asking the question.

So I ask myself, and invite each of us to ask ourselves, who is in our villages and how are we prioritizing them? As with the issue of which worlds we choose to repair, the only wrong answer is that we live in our own private villages, so we need not give priority to anyone beyond ourselves and those who are just like us. Other than that, we really can't get it wrong.

Ultimately, imagine what might happen were we to simply encourage ourselves and each other to ask, "Who really is in our village and which worlds do we want to repair?", knowing that in a world of infinite need, each answer is correct, and the only test we need to pass, is the extent to which are occupied with answering those questions.

We started out tending a single Garden 5,782 years ago, or millions of years before that, or both, depending upon how you count. Now the entire planet is our garden, and Rosh Hashanah is our chance to remember that we are all descended from the original gardeners — that we are here, each of one us, to tend our chosen plots as best we can. May God help us, and may we be blessed to help one another, to do so.



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