

# Towards the Meaning of the Yom Kippur War

## 1.

It is natural for a Jew, who believes that all the events which impact the life of *Am Yisrael* are directed by Divine Providence, to explore the explanation and meaning of those events.

The Torah and the prophets command us, without pause, to reflect; and it is also a natural, intellectual demand placed on one who positions himself upon a foundation of belief. The Sages define a person who does not attempt to penetrate the true meaning of the events which he encounters, and in which he is involved, as one who is dead:

An evildoer is considered dead, even while alive, because he sees the sun rise and does not recite the blessing “Who creates light”; and he sees it set and does not recite the blessing “Who brings on the evening” (*Tanhuma, Ve-Zot ha-Berakha* 7).

On the other hand, it is clear that we lack the tools to know the “secrets of God” and to establish what the considerations, drivers, and intentions of Divine Providence were. However, this does not free us from our duty to delve [into these issues] and to reflect. “It is Torah and we need to learn it!”

Furthermore, sometimes a person, while viewing events through the perspective of faith, merits that the mist dissolves and things come into focus, and he reaches a sense of internal certainty; a certainty that cannot always be proved scientifically, but which does not detract from its validity. This is the power of faith, which is the birthright of those who serve God, believers, the children of believers.

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## 2.

I have no intention to introduce new ideas, I will merely suggest an arrangement of concepts which we all know already.

The question which is asked at the moment, and I hear it whenever I meet with civilians and soldiers alike, is: What is the meaning of the Yom Kippur War?

This question is posed against the background of our definite faith that we are living in a period of the *at'halta di-ge'ula*, the first flourishing of redemption. Everything we have experienced until this point confirms and strengthens our certainty that we are indeed in the midst of the initial days of the redemption. And against the background of this belief, and against the background of the Six Day War, which taught us that war indeed has a real goal (which is conquest of the Land of Israel), this question splits into two:

1. What was the Divine purpose of the [Yom Kippur] War?<sup>1</sup> The Land of Israel was already in our possession after the Six Day War, so what was the purpose of this war?
2. A more searing question: Was there not a retreat in some sense, God forbid, in the Yom Kippur War? Did the outbreak of the war itself (with all its distressing phenomena)<sup>2</sup> not raise the possibility that there is, as it were, a withdrawal in the Godly process of the bringing of redemption?

1 As per R. Amital's statement of the background to this fundamental question, which was the Six Day War, he is posing a spiritual, not a practical question—given that from the founding of the State of Israel until the Six Day War, there had been a mounting sense of growth, strength, and expansion, to the point that it had become clear that the wars during that initial period, as painful as they were, had a real purpose—to conquer the whole land: What then was God's larger, divine aim in allowing the Yom Kippur War to occur? That war did not add any land to that acquired in 1967. In a quest to understand the spiritual meaning of the Yom Kippur War, R. Amital's analysis seems to be unique. After the war's initial trauma, R. Amital traveled to visit the students of his yeshiva around the country, to strengthen them and teach. We should note that the number of students in Yeshivat Har Etzion who lost their lives in the Yom Kippur War was significant, and this impacted R. Amital profoundly as was apparent from his essays and speeches from then on. The book this essay appeared in is dedicated to the memory of the eight Har Etzion students who lost their lives in the war: Avner Yonah, Amaziah Ilani, Asher Yaron, Binyamin Gal, Daniel Orlick, Moshe Tal, Raphael Neuman, and Sarel Birnbaum *zt"l*. It is crucial to contextualize how much the war and the loss of these students (and others who fell later) impacted R. Amital. On this, see Yehudah Mirsky's contribution in this issue of *TRADITION*.

2 Presumably R. Amital is referring to the serious lapses in intelligence and readiness, such that the State of Israel was caught unawares in 1973.

Behind these questions another one hides, if it is possible to define it as a question (because one can only ask a question where it is possible to supply an answer, but perhaps it is a sort of question): What can we expect for the future, in the wake of the Yom Kippur War? This is a question which only those gifted with prophecy can answer definitively; we can only speak of a general approach.

Nevertheless, these are the questions that all of us ask, raised as we were with the faith that we are indeed in the midst of the time of redemption's first flowering.

### 3.

We must say this: All of the troubles and suffering which have occurred to the Jewish people in every generation and in every era, including the troubles and suffering of which the prophets spoke and which the Sages foresaw, including the sufferings of the birthpangs of the Messiah, in the wake of which a great rebirth will come—none of these sufferings are required to occur in the larger scheme of things.

A rebirth can occur without these travails, using the approach of “Before she begins birth pangs, she has already given birth; before the pain arrives, she has already delivered a boy” (Isaiah 66:7).<sup>3</sup> If we merit it, we merit great things without the birth pangs of the Messiah; if we do not merit it, great things are brought about through suffering. As the holy *Or ha-Hayyim* writes:

If the redemption occurs through the agency of Israel's merit, it will be an event, wondrous in stature, and the redeemer of Israel will be revealed from heaven with a miracle and sign . . . but this is not the case if the redemption occurs because the designated time has arrived and Israel is unworthy of it—in such a case it will occur in a different manner, regarding which it is stated that the redeemer will come “humbled and riding upon a donkey”<sup>4</sup> (*Or ha-Hayyim* to Numbers 25:17).

According to what is happening now, it is clear that we are in the stages of the redemption brought about through suffering; however, the possibility that the redemption could come in another way draws us into

3 *Pesikta Zutrata, Shir ha-Shirim* 6:12. R. Amital is referring to two different approaches as to how the final redemption could occur—one which is easy and painless; the other which is fraught with difficulty. See *Sanhedrin* 98a, “If they are meritorious, the Messiah arrives with the clouds of heaven; if not, he arrives humbled and riding upon a donkey.”

4 In the original text of the *Or ha-Hayyim*, the citation is given for this verse: Zechariah 9:9.

an halakhic obligation—a positive mitzva that is a function of our present time. That is, the obligation of crying out, described by Rambam as:

It is a positive Torah commandment to cry out and to sound trumpets in the event of any trouble which comes upon the community, as it states: “[When you go out to war . . . against] an enemy who troubles you; you must sound the trumpets” (Numbers 10:9).

This is the classic case, “An enemy who troubles you!”

This means [continues Rambam], you must cry out [to Hashem] and sound [the trumpets] for whatever causes you trouble, for example, famine, plague, locusts and the like. This practice is one of the paths of repentance, for when a trouble comes, and the people cry out [to God] and sound the trumpets, everyone will know that they are suffering evil because of their wicked deeds, as it is written, “Your sins have turned away [the rains and your sins prevent the good from reaching you]” (Jeremiah 5:25). This [repentance] will cause [God] to remove the trouble from them. However, should [the people] fail to cry out [to God] and fail to sound the trumpets, and instead say, “This thing happened to us because it is the way of the world and this trouble is a chance occurrence,” this is a path of cruelty, which causes them to remain attached to their wicked deeds; and [due to their indifference] the trouble will add further troubles. This is what is written in the Torah, “If you remain indifferent to Me, I will be searingly indifferent” (Leviticus 26:27–28). As if to say, “When I bring a trouble upon you so that you shall repent, if you say that it is a chance occurrence, I will add to you a searing indifference” (*Hilkhot Ta’anuyot* 1:1–3).

This fact—that the redemption could come without suffering, but that it is coming [currently] accompanied by suffering—obligates us in the positive mitzva of crying out to God, of introspection, of reflection on our deeds, and knowing that God expects us to repent.

#### 4.

And here it is suitable to sound the alarm regarding one particular issue.

Sadly, for some time it has been noticeable that among religious Jewry, or at least within a significant portion of it, there is a sense that repentance is a positive obligation which *other people* are commanded to perform.

Wherever you turn, you hear, “The war broke out and caused what it did because of the sins of *Am Yisrael*—certainly because of the sins of *those*

Jews, those military figures, those political leaders, in all of whose words are expressed the arrogance of “it is my might and the strength of my hand [which has caused all my success!]” (Deuteronomy 8:17).

I have to say something about this matter. I believe that if God does have a claim against anyone, first and foremost, it is a claim against those Jews, believers, children of believers, who are immersed in the *beit midrash*. If He wishes to lay a claim against others then it is suitable to claim for far more serious things [than the arrogance expressed of “my might and the strength of my hand”]; and it is doubtful if it is possible to claim this against them: it is doubtful whether one could make such a claim against a person who never has God’s name on his lips. If there is a claim to be made, it is against us!

Now, as regards the claim itself: Firstly, the statement, “it is my might and the strength of my hand” was not made about weapons and not in connection with war. These words were said regarding possessions, houses, a life of ease:

Beware that after you eat and be satisfied, and build good houses and settle, and your cattle and sheep multiply, and you possess much gold and silver, and everything you have is in abundance; then your heart becomes arrogant and you forget the Lord your God Who took you out of Egypt from the house of slavery . . . and you say in your heart, “It is my might and the strength of my hand which has caused all my success!” (Deuteronomy 8:11–17).

This refers to the luxuries of a townhouse, a car, and all the other accessories of convenience.

Nevertheless, it is still permitted to say, “it is my might and the strength of my hand” as long as you “remember the Lord your God, because it is He Who gives you the power to succeed!” (v. 18). It is possible to say, “it is my might and the strength of my hand” while knowing from Whose hand you have that power. As R. Nissim of Gerona wrote in the fourteenth century:

The meaning [of this verse] is as follows. It is true that certain people have abilities in one area or another. Just as there are some people receptive to receive wisdom, others are receptive to devise strategies to collect and acquire wealth. And according to this, there is some truth in a wealthy person saying, “It is my might and the strength of my hand which has caused all my success!” [The verse here is actually saying,] “Seeing that this power is planted within you, be sure to remember Who it was who placed that power within you, and from whence it comes!”

This is what the Torah meant when it stated, “You must remember the Lord your God, because it is He Who gives you the power to succeed!” The verse does not say, “You must remember that the Lord your God gives you success”; if that were so, it would be rejecting the idea that the power planted within you is an intermediate reason for the collection of the wealth [and rather saying that God is the sole and immediate reason for that success]. But this is not how the verse was written, and therefore the Torah said that “Since your power is what generates this wealth,<sup>5</sup> remember the Giver of that power, may He be blessed” (*Derashot ha-Ran #10*).

Similarly, regarding military might, the thought alone that “it is my might and the strength of my hand,” is not inherently flawed. Rather, what is flawed is the discontinuation of the thought regarding the *source* of the power which brought about the success [as was highlighted in the passage by Ran above]. And it is suitable to emphasize this point, because one often hears strident announcements (under the guise of declarations of faith) which include contempt for the power of arms, strategy, and the heroism of warriors. And this is what Ramban says concerning this (Deuteronomy 8:18):

It is known that Israel is mighty and successful at waging war, because they were compared to lions and a “tearing wolf” and Israel defeated the kings of Canaan. Therefore, God warned them: If you think that ‘It is my might and the strength of my hand which has caused all my success,’ you should remember God Who took you out of Egypt where you had no power or might at all. And you should remember further that in the desert, where you were powerless to survive, He provided all your needs. If so, this success you have achieved [in the Land of Israel] through your power, is also through Him, Who gave you the power which you used. And if you forget God, that power and your remnants will dwindle, and you will be lost, just like the Canaanites were—for anyone “who leaves Hashem, will fade away” (Isaiah 1:28).

It is clear that we have to fight against any phenomenon of feeling or emphasis of “it is my might and the strength of my hand” in all segments

5 The word “*hayyil*” can mean both “wealth” as well as more generally “success.” The whole question cited by R. Amital arises because the term can be read both ways. Generally, we have translated it as “success” unless it is clear by context that it should be “wealth,” as it is in this case.

[within the community]; however, this principle may not be allowed to weaken us or to bring us to seek paths which lead in alien directions.<sup>6</sup>

Secondly, we should reflect on the *midrashim* and declarations of the Sages. I explored how they explain military defeats (and there were many such [military failures in the past]) but I didn't find a single statement of *Hazal* that explained that a defeat was due to the thought that "it is my might and the strength of my hand." I did find other sins [given as reasons], and these are the words of the Sages in the *Tanhuma, Parashat Hukat 4*:

R. Yehoshua of Sikhnin said in the name of R. Levi, "In the times of [King] David, before children had tasted the taste of sin, they could explain the Torah in 49 perspectives of *tum'a* and 49 perspectives of *tahara*. And David would pray for them and would say, 'You, God, guard them! You will guard him forever from this generation' (Psalms 12:8).

The explanation of this verse is as follows: 'You, God, guard them,' means, 'Preserve their Torah within their hearts.' ['You will guard him forever from this generation' means] 'Guard him from this generation which is liable for destruction.'

And after all this praise, they would go out to war and fall because there were informers amongst them. This is what David said, 'My soul is among lions; I lie among those who are aflame; people whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue is a sharp sword' (Psalms 57:5). [The explanation of this verse is as follows.] 'My soul is among lions' – this refers to Abner and Amasa who were lions of Torah. 'I lie among those who are aflame' – this refers to Doeg and Ahithophel who were inflamed by slanderous gossip. 'People whose teeth are spears and arrows' – this refers to the people of Keilah, as it is said [by David when enquiring of God], 'Will the people of Keilah hand me over into Saul's hand?' (I Samuel 23:11). 'And their tongue is a sharp sword' – this refers to the Ziphites, as it is said, 'When the Ziphites came and said to Saul, "Is not David hiding with us?"' (Psalms 57:2).

6 R. Amital here outlines that utilizing military force is part and parcel of the Jewish tradition, even though it may eventually influence some people to misconstrue the source of military success as themselves. The Jewish approach is not to eschew the use of military force out of concern for this possibility, but rather to ensure that we teach that God is the source of our successes, including military victory. He seems to be hinting towards the approach taken within certain Jewish circles which argue against religious Jews serving in the IDF.

At that point, David said, ‘God, be exalted above the heavens; let Your glory be over all the earth’ (Psalms 57:6), meaning, ‘Remove your presence from amongst them!’<sup>7</sup> However, in the generation of Ahab, everyone worshipped idols, but since they did not have informers amongst them, they would go out to war and be victorious. This is as Obadiah said to Elijah, ‘Has my master not been told what I did when Jezebel killed the prophets of Hashem – I hid one-hundred of God’s prophets, fifty each in a cave, and I supplied them with bread and water’ (I Kings 18:13). [Rabbi Yehoshua explains this verse as follows.] Why did the verse specify both bread and water? Because water was more difficult to bring to them than bread. And Elijah announced on Mount Carmel, ‘I alone am left as a prophet of the Lord’ (I Kings 18:22), ‘and the whole nation knows, but they do not tell the king.’”

These are the foundations that can assist us in understanding these issues. If we seek sins [which serve as the cause of our wars and military losses], the Sages teach us that we should look for them in the realm of interpersonal behavior. They state in *Eliyahu Zuta* (7): “What was Jeroboam’s nature that he merited to restore Israel’s border? Wasn’t he an idolater? The answer is that he never accepted slander about Amos the prophet.”

We don’t know exactly which sins are the ones that [are responsible for the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War]; but we should seek them with *Hazal’s* perspective; and heaven forbid that we ignore those sins which they discussed.

What is demanded is our own repentance; not that of others. “Let us go and return to God, because He has torn and He will heal us; He has struck [us] and He will bind [us] up” (Hosea 6:1).

However, together with this, one needs to know that the purpose of suffering is not only punishment. Suffering is also cathartic and it educates. Suffering has educational goals that could be completely distant from the sins which caused the trouble. An educational goal elevates a person through the path of suffering by a process of inserting [into a person] an awareness and sensitivity in a particular realm or direction, a process which could be lengthy or short. Clearly, it all depends on us, and us alone.

7 This completes R. Yehoshua’s description of David’s generation—on the one hand with all the children being able to expound deeply on any principle of Torah, but on the other hand, with the generation so enamoured of slander and betrayal of their fellow Jews, that they lost their battles and David prayed to God to remove His presence from amongst them. R. Yehoshua next describes the generation of Ahab which was idolatrous, but its people won their wars because they did not betray their fellows.



## 5.

Another duty emerges from that first obligation of crying out to God—that of gratitude.

Rambam says that we cry out and sound the trumpets and fast, and when salvation arrives and the rains fall, we recite *Hallel* in praise and thanksgiving to God. Due to our many sins, at least on the home front, the awareness of our debt of gratitude is not felt as much as is required. We need to know that there was an exceptionally great salvation here, despite the tremendous sacrifices and pain. And we are obligated to give thanks. Had we known the extent of the salvation, we would sense its Messianic foundation, and we will address this further, later on.

What happened, happened, and we entered this war with no sense of existential danger. All were certain that the IDF would be victorious. Some said, “The IDF is strong!” Some added, “With the help of Hashem, the IDF is strong!” But there was no sense of peril, and because of this, the only ones who feel the magnitude of the salvation are those who sensed the great danger with their flesh.<sup>8</sup>

The Mishna states, “[You shall love Hashem] with all your might.’ This means, for every measure which He measures to you, you should thank Him tremendously” (*Berakhot* 9:5). And the halakha states:

If one’s father passes away, one makes the blessing, “The true judge.” If the father had money which he inherits: if he has no brothers, he also makes the blessing, “*Sheheheyanu*”; and if he has brothers, instead of “*Sheheheyanu*,” he makes the blessing, “One who is good and does good” (*Shulhan Arukh, Orach Hayyim* 223:2).

This is the halakha! Even when the pain is great. Even when many, many families are mourning, the pain does not erase the obligation of gratitude. The Sages state (*Yalkut Shimoni* 2:414):

“When I have brought upon you the good – give thanks; when I have brought upon you suffering – give thanks. And David also said this, ‘I will raise the cup of salvation; and I will call in Hashem’s name. When I find trouble and sorrow, I will call in Hashem’s name’” (*Yalkut Shimoni* 2:414).

8 Meaning, the soldiers themselves. R. Amital is noting that, as opposed to 1967, when the entire country was gripped with a sense of portending doom, people did not feel that way in 1973 on the eve of the war; therefore, a split emerged in the populace—only the soldiers who saw with their own eyes how close we came to utter destruction understood how great a salvation we experienced in 1973.

## 6.

This was an obligatory war, a *milhemet mitzva*, from two perspectives.

From the perspective of “aiding Israel from an enemy” (Rambam, *Hilkhot Melakhim* 5:1) the IDF is arrayed for war against an attacking army which wishes to annihilate us, “and it is a mitzva on all of Israel who are able to come in and go out [militarily] to help their brothers who are besieged and to save them from idolaters” (Rambam, *Hilkhot Shabbat* 2:23).

Similarly, a war for the sake of the Land of Israel, even without the danger of annihilation, is a *milhemet mitzva*. And it is considered a war for the sake of the Land of Israel even if the fighting takes place in Egypt, as Rambam rules (*Hilkhot Melakhim* 5:8) on the basis of the *Yerushalmi*, “It is permitted to return to Egypt for trade, business, and to conquer the land” (*Sanhedrin* 10:8). Indeed, there are two versions of the text in this case, the other being “to conquer other lands,” however the text in the *Yerushalmi* is “to conquer the land,” and it is on this there that Rambam bases his words.<sup>9</sup>

Any war in Israel is also a war for the unification of God’s Holy Name. The words of Rambam are well known, which I spoke about on Yom Kippur itself:

Once one enters the throes of battle, he should rely on the Hope of Israel and its Savior in times of trouble. He should know that he is waging war for the sake of the unification of God’s name and he should endanger himself and not fear or dread [death]. He should not think about his wife nor about his children; rather, he should wipe their memory from his heart, focusing solely on the war. And anyone who begins to think and ponder and frighten himself violates a prohibition, as it is written, “You shall not be afraid, and you shall not be alarmed, and you shall not be terrified because of them” (Deuteronomy 20:3), furthermore, [if he did frighten himself], he is responsible for the blood of all of Israel. If he did not overcome [his fear] and did not wage war with all his heart

9 Rav Amital writes here that there are two versions of the text—but it is unclear to which text he is referring. After consulting all the standard commentaries on Rambam, as well as the alternative versions of the Rambam cited in the Frankel edition, we were unable to find a text of the Rambam which had the alternative wording, “to conquer the land.” Many of the commentators here note that Rambam’s source is the *Yerushalmi* where the wording is “to conquer the land.” See the commentary of the *Yad Peshuta*, ad loc. R. Amital’s meaning seems to be that the *Yerushalmi* is the original text and that Rambam’s reading of the *Yerushalmi* is the alternative version, which seems to be at odds with the original source. But note, Rambam cites the *Yerushalmi* as we have it in *Sefer ha-Mitzvot*, Negative Commandments #46.

and soul, it is considered as if he shed the blood of everyone, as it states, “He should not cause the heart of his brothers to melt, as his heart” (v. 8). It is explicitly stated in the prophetic tradition, “Cursed be he who performs God’s work deceitfully, and cursed be he who withholds his sword from blood” (Jeremiah 40:8).

And anyone who fights with all his heart, without fear, with the intention of sanctifying Hashem’s name alone, can be assured that he will find no harm, nor will evil reach him, and he will build a sturdy home in Israel and he will earn merit for himself and his children forever, and he will merit life in the world to come (*Hilkhot Melakhim* 7:16).

There is a unique mitzva—to know that one is waging war for the sake of the unification of God; but that knowledge does not change the nature of the war, which is waged for the sake of His unification, whether the one taking part in it is aware of this or is unaware of it.

Israel, *by virtue of its very existence*, represents the Godly idea of His unity and His ways of *tzedaka* and justice. The meaning of a victory by Israel is a victory of the Godly idea; and so too the opposite, God forbid.

“You are my witnesses, says Hashem, and I am God” (Isaiah 43:10). Only the Sages could express it in so searing a fashion, “House of Israel – when you are my witnesses, then I am God; but when you are not my witnesses, as it were, I am not God” (*Yalkut Shimoni* 2:455). They also say, “[God is] just and saved’ (Zechariah 9:9), [and the midrash notes that] the verse should have said, ‘[God is] just and saves’ and it also states there, “R. Abahu said, ‘The redemption is yours and ours . . . and it is written, ‘I will show him God’s salvation (Psalms 50:23).’ The verse did not say ‘Israel’s salvation,’ but rather, ‘God’s salvation’” (*Yalkut Shimoni* 2:577).<sup>10</sup>

A war waged by non-Jews against Israel is a war against God Himself, and since they cannot fight directly against Him, they fight against Israel. “Those who say, ‘We have the upper hand; God did not make all this happen!’ (Deuteronomy 32:27). If they were able to tunnel under the heavens and ascend upwards, they would do so!” (*Shoher Tov* 74).

Further, a war waged against the Land of Israel is a war against Jerusalem. I once told the story (which has now been confirmed by that

10 R. Amital has conflated two sections of *Yalkut Shimoni* 2:577. The second part cited here (“R. Abahu . . .”) appears in the original before the first section cited here “when you are my witnesses . . .” The implication is that it is not only Israel being saved, but Hashem with them, as it were. Thus Israel’s salvation is also Hashem’s—when Israel is fighting a battle, it is also fighting on behalf of Hashem.

adversary, Hassanein Heikal)<sup>11</sup> that one of our important diplomats visited the ruler of Egypt six years ago and afterwards returned to Jerusalem and told the mayor, “You should know that the main problem for the Arabs is Jerusalem; not the Suez Canal, not Sinai, not Sharm El Sheikh, only Jerusalem!” The mayor said, “I’m astonished! Even for him? Even for Egypt?” The diplomat said to him, “Yes – only Jerusalem is the problem, even for the Egyptians.”

Only a war against Judaism and Jerusalem could unify all the Arab countries, which until only yesterday, were trying to swallow each other up. And, therefore, the bright minds of political Zionism never saw this coming. They never took into account that the establishment of the State of Israel would entail war with all Arab countries. No Jewish or non-Jewish politician ever entertained the thought that the Arab countries would all unite for the sake of such a small piece of land. But they all forgot that the Arabs’ war is against Jerusalem; and against Jerusalem, there is jihad. This finds exalted expression in the fact that the war broke out on Yom Kippur—this holy and exalted day—because this war is against Judaism, a war against God; and there is no day that expresses Israel’s uniqueness, our connection to our Father in Heaven, more than Yom Kippur.

Additionally, wars of non-Jews against us are primarily against the “fine” Jews, the Yom Kippur Jews. As Rambam writes:

Because the Creator has set us aside through His commandments and statutes, and because our pre-eminence is manifested in His general rules and ordinances (as it is said [Deuteronomy 4:8], “And what great nation is there, that has statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?”), all the idolaters envied us with a great envy, and their kings were pressured by this to arouse resentment and hatred against us. And their desire is actually to make war against God and to argue with Him—“but He is God, and who can argue with Him?” (*Iggeret Teiman*).

[As it states:] “‘I am blackened, but beautiful’ (Song of Songs 1:5). This means, I am blackened all the days of the year, but I am beautiful on Yom Kippur” (*Yalkut, Shir ha-Shirim* 982).

11 Mohamed Hassanein Heikal (1923–2016) was one of the most influential Arab journalists of his day, serving as the editor of the Egyptian *Al-Ahram* newspaper from 1957–1974. He was a hard-line opponent of Israel and also opposed the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt.

## 7.

These ideas are valid, clearly, for all wars. When one speaks of war, one should view things with a biblical eye; and one should view this war in a Messianic perspective.

The essence of the phenomenon of war is itself biblical. For the two thousand years of our exile, we did not know war.<sup>12</sup> We knew many terrible persecutions; but we did not know war. There was huge excitement due to the Warsaw Ghetto uprising; but the ghetto uprising was a war of despair. The 1948 War of Independence, on the other hand, was a war of the type described by the verse, “Five of you will chase one hundred” (Leviticus 26:8), on which Ramban comments: “That He will give them the courage of heart and might that five will pursue one hundred.”

In the exile, there is no war—the reality of the exile is “I shall bring fear into their heart” (Leviticus 26:36)—a rustling leaf will frighten them.

In any war, one should always see the biblical aspects—the Bible is replete with wars, but since we did not engage in war in the exile, we paid no attention to this aspect. Moses spoke to all the tribes in his last days about waging wars victoriously: “Let Reuben live and not die . . . And this is for Judah . . . God has heard the voice of Judah . . . and He will be a help from his enemies” (Deuteronomy 33:6–7). He spoke about Torah, “They will teach Your ordinances to Jacob and Your Torah to Israel” (v. 10), and immediately thereafter, “God should bless His army and You should favorably accept its actions; God! Strike the loins of those who rise up against Him and His enemies, so that they will not recover” (v. 11).

The faithful shepherd Moses’ final words were: “Praiseworthy are you, O Israel, who is like you? A nation saved by God, Who is your helping shield, your majestic sword. Your enemies will lie to you, but you will

12 This is an idea strongly articulated in the thought of Rav Kook, who viewed the exile as a severing of the Jewish people from physical and natural expressions of strength; with the nation existing on a more ethereal, spiritual plane only. R. Kook felt that with the return to *Eretz Yisrael* the Jewish people could tap into the wellsprings of physicality in a spiritually healthy manner. It is important to note that R. Amital built his initial spiritual map upon the teachings of R. Kook. After the Yom Kippur we witness a significant divergence between R. Amital’s thinking on many of these matters and that of other followers of Rav Kook within the Religious Zionist world. This divergence was partly a result of the different ways that R. Amital read R. Kook, and this became particularly evident after the withdrawal from Gush Katif in 2005. See, for example, his essay, “What Kind of Redemption Does Israel Represent?” at: [www.etzion.org.il/en/holidays/yom-haatzmaut/what-kind-redemption-does-israel-represent](http://www.etzion.org.il/en/holidays/yom-haatzmaut/what-kind-redemption-does-israel-represent). In the remainder of this section of the essay, R. Amital notes that in the exile we lost access to much of the original context and meaning of the Bible—such as the military battles fought by David, for example, which were interpreted allegorically. With our return to the Land such passages again resonate with their original tones.

tread upon their heights” (v. 29). The Psalms receive a meaning which is not new to them; they receive anew their original meaning—because David, King of Israel, waged war!

It is forbidden to view this war as we viewed the persecutions in the days of the exile. We must see the greatness of the hour, in the biblical context, and it can be understood only in its Messianic dimension. If, after two thousand years of exile, we return and breathe the biblical air of *Eretz Yisrael*, it can only be through a Messianic light.

One of the *Roshei Yeshiva* told me that in the wake of the war, he had to inform a certain family that their son had fallen in battle. After about half an hour, the bereaved father said, “I survived the *Sho’ah*; in it, I lost a wife and five children who did not even merit a Jewish burial. My son now merited to be born in the Land of Israel, to live in it, to learn in it, to give his life on its behalf, and to be buried with a Jewish burial. Despite everything, there is some progress.”

A person is not judged for his actions in his time of anguish. I would not say it is only “some progress”; indeed, I testify that in my youth, when we were caught in the thick of the *Sho’ah*, our sweetest dream was that if it was decreed upon us to [one day] be killed, that at least we should fall in a war for the Land of Israel.

## 8.

There are three reasons to view the Yom Kippur War through a Messianic perspective:

First, the war broke out against the background of the establishment of Jewish sovereignty. “When God reigns, the nations tremble” (Psalms 99:1)— when Israel is redeemed, when Israel begins to establish sovereignty, the nations of the world are angered. When Israel is in exile—the nations of the world are tranquil, they are not agitated. The Sages report that this is what God responds to them:

So many empires ruled from amongst you and my children did not complain! . . . And now you are angry? I will also become angered and will not be placated, as the verse says, “When God reigns, the nations tremble” (*Yalkut Shimoni* 2:852).

And, additionally, in the *Sifre* (*Ha’azinu* 333, s.v. “*harninu*”) it states that in the future the same phenomenon which occurred with the Exodus from Egypt will recur, “the nations heard and were angered” (Exodus 15:14), because the nations sense their downfall approaching—“And I will remove the spirit of impurity from the land” (Zechariah 13:2). These are their death throes; this is the focus of the war. The nations are fighting over the essence of their existence as nations, as agents of impurity. Evil is

fighting the battle for its own existence—it knows that that after the wars of the Lord, there will be no place for the Satan or for the spirit of impurity. This war, which arose on the backdrop of the establishment of Israel's sovereignty is therefore lent a Messianic aspect.

Second, the participation of all the nations of the world in this war also points to the Messianic aspect of these events. Not only did so many Arab countries participate in the war, but all the world's nations became involved, "superpowers," "sub-powers," and even small countries—because all are consumers of the region's oil.

[We can apply the following verse to this war:] "Nations have stirred, kingdoms have tottered!" (Psalms 46:7). [We are witness to] the far-reaching changes which are being created and will be created because of this war: the whole political structure is crumbling; the technological changes which will be formed due to the search for replacements for fuel; the idol of Western Culture—technology—is struggling for its survival. And this is all due to the war. [We see] the cultural-moral collapse of the entire Western-Christian culture: the chatter about the brotherhood of nations, about international solidarity is revealed as empty and baseless; selfishness is revealed in all its glory.

Nothing can cover up the world's leading lights fawning before cultural and moral ephemera; nor their fawning before the dictators of countries in which slave regimes dominate, which are pervaded by a pre-medieval darkness. All these things belie the war's local and temporal aspect and, instead, ascribe to it its Messianic element, its revolutionary, historical perspective. "Nations have stirred, kingdoms have tottered; He let out His voice, the earth shall melt. The Lord of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress forever!" (Psalms 46:6-7).

Finally, the salvation in the war was tremendous, but at this point, only a few recognize it. In the history of Israel, there were very few wars like this—"many against the few."

[Before 1973,] we used to demonstrate that we are always fighting a "war of the many against the few" by comparing the number of citizens in the State of Israel to the number of citizens in all the Arab nations; however, on the war front, in any particular sector [in previous wars], the ratio of each side's soldiers against each other was never that [bad]. But this time, it was actually one Israeli tank against a hundred. There had never been a ratio of one to a hundred before. And if you add to this the many weapons of the enemy and the miserable state in which we began the war (those failures which have been discussed and will be discussed); and after all this, we achieved what we achieved; if we consider those sectors in the North and South in which our forces were not arrayed at all, and nevertheless the enemy was stopped by them—this was unequivocally a Divine

decree. Had [our enemies] not been stopped, they would have continued to race on, and they would have burned and destroyed every place they came to. If we speak with soldiers and fighters, if we listen to the stories of senior commanders, stories which they told when their hearts were still open due to the shocks that came with the war (perhaps they will never repeat those stories), we would understand that the measure of salvation in this war contained elements of great miracles, which explains the Messianic aspect of the victory.

In all other periods we were not accustomed to such [miraculous, military salvations]: it is not the type of salvation we merited in the exile. Here we are discussing salvations of which the prophets prophesied, of which the Sages spoke. However, due to our many sins, this feeling has not penetrated people's hearts.

These three things—that the war arose on the backdrop of the re-establishment of the State of Israel, the universality of the war, and the aspects of the great salvation (and if we add to this, the fact that this war broke out on Yom Kippur)—give the Yom Kippur War its Messianic element.

## 9.

Let us return to the questions we asked at the beginning: the meaning of this war, with all its saddening phenomena, and the *at'halta di-ge'ula*, Israel's first flourishing of redemption.

Let us enquire: what is the purpose of wars in the period of redemption's arrival? Do they only arise before the establishment of Israel's sovereignty, or can they come even after its establishment? [Before the Yom Kippur War], we set aside these questions because we didn't want, and it was not easy, to speak about them. And if wars were expected even after the establishment of the State of Israel, the question arises: do wars at that stage come only for the sake of conquering the land, or might they have other purposes? We will attempt to clarify how this war can be framed within the processes of redemption.

At the outset we must preface our words by saying: we cannot know about whatever touches on the period of redemption and the period of the Messiah; and we do not pretend to know the details, as Rambam states:

No person will know how all of these things, and all that is similar to them, will happen, until they happen, because these things are obscured in the words of the Prophets. Even the Sages have no tradition about these things, except according to the determination of the verses. Therefore, there is a dispute among them regarding these matters.



In any event, neither the order of the occurrence of these events nor their details are foundational principles of our religion. A person should never occupy himself with the *aggadot* and *midrashim* concerning these and similar matters, nor should he set them as the main point, for they do not bring one to fear or love [of God]. So too, one should not calculate the appointed times for the arrival of the Messiah . . . . Rather, one should wait and believe in the general approach to the matter, as we explained (*Hilkhot Melakhim* 12:2).

We ask about the connection between the *at'halta di-ge'ula* and wars. The Gemara states, "War is also the *at'halta di-ge'ula*" (*Megilla* 17b). Rambam supplies a sign to identify the Messiah [as follows]:

If a king arises from the house of David, who contemplates the Torah and engages in *mitzvot* like David his forefather, according to the Written and Oral Torah, and he compels all of Israel to follow the Torah and to repair its breaches and he fights the wars of the Lord – then there is the presumption that he is the Messiah (*Hilkhot Melakhim* 11:4).

We see that [even] after the establishment of the Kingdom of the House of David, the king will have to fight the wars of the Lord. In the Midrash it is said, "Approach there and eat of the bread, and dip your bread in the vinegar." (*Ruth* 2:14). [The meaning of this is as follows:] "Approach there means come close to kingship; Eat of the bread – this is the bread of kingship; Dip your bread in the vinegar – this is suffering" (*Rut Rabba* 5:6). We are already eating the bread of kingship, but nevertheless, we still dip it in vinegar—in suffering. [In this regard, we should also enquire:] when will the apocalyptic war of Gog and Magog come? [The Prophet states:]

Son of man, set your face toward Gog, the land of Magog, the prince, the head of Meshech and Tuval, and prophesy concerning him . . . . And I shall unbridle you, [Gog], and I shall put hooks into your jaws and bring you forth and all your army, horses and riders, all of them clothed in finery, a great assembly, with encompassing shield and buckler, all of them grasping swords . . . . For many days you will be remembered; and at the end of the years you will come to a land [whose inhabitants] returned from the sword, gathered from many peoples, upon the mountains of Israel, which had been continually laid waste, but it was liberated from the nations, and they all dwelt securely. . . . And you will say, "I shall ascend upon a land of open cities; I shall come upon the tranquil, who dwell securely; all of them living without a wall, and they have no bars or doors" (*Ezekiel* 38:2–11).

There is a period of dwelling securely, [and] there is a period of ingathering of the exiles. Let us recall the words of the Vilna Gaon that the war of Gog and Magog in our time splits into smaller wars, He cites the Midrash:

This can be compared to a king who vowed to throw a [large] stone onto his son. Later, he reconciled with his son [but] he said, "I cannot cancel my words!" What did he do? He broke the stone into [smaller] pieces and threw them onto his son (*Kol ha-Tor* 1:6, citing *Yalkut Shimoni*, Psalms 635).

The Gaon said that in the merit of prayers, and in the merit of our suffering, and in the merit of all that [that was wrong in the world] the great ones of Israel repaired, the war of Gog and Magog is fragmented [and parceled out in smaller pieces]. And all this relates to the period after which we have dwelt securely in the land.

In Zechariah it is said:

And it shall come to pass on that day that I will make Jerusalem a stone of burden for all peoples; all who bear it will be gashed, and all the nations of the earth will gather about it. . . . And it will come to pass on that day that I shall seek to destroy all the nations that come upon Jerusalem. And I shall pour out upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplications (12:3–11).

And after this:

And they will look to Me because of those who have been stabbed, and they will mourn over it as one mourns over an only son, and they will be in bitterness, as one is embittered over a firstborn son. On that day there will be great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the Valley of Megiddon. And the land will mourn, family by family (Zechariah 12:10–12).

About this Radak comments:

Afterwards, God said that if it should happen that one of them would be stabbed in war, even an ordinary person amongst them, it will be greatly astonishing for them—how could such a thing happen? And they will consider this as the beginning of their downfall and subjugation before their enemies; as Joshua did when the people of Ai killed thirty-six men of Israel, he said, "Alas, God!" (Joshua 7:6), and he said, "What can I say after Israel has turned their necks before their enemies!" (v. 7). So too will their status be at that stage, if they will see that even one of them gets stabbed.

This is the phenomenon and the feeling of "family by family" mourning.

There are things which are difficult to grasp and even more difficult to digest. The announcement of “through your blood shall you live” (Ezekiel 16:6) is one of those things which God Himself, as it were, feels that Israel is unable to grasp. Is it true that “through your blood shall you live”? Is there no greater contradiction than that between blood and life? Does it really need to be this way? And God repeats His statement, a second time, “And I passed over you and I saw you downtrodden in your blood, and I said to you, ‘Through your blood shall you live.’ And I said to you, ‘Through your blood shall you live.’”

## 10.

After the establishment of the Kingdom of Israel, war will come, perhaps several wars, and the sources mention a cruel war. We do not know the details of these things. However, the Sages speak of it lasting forty-five days (*Shir ha-Shirim Rabba* 2). We do not know the meaning of the details, but we know that it will be a temporary phenomenon only.

“The first redeemer will be like the final redeemer” (*Yalkut Shimoni* 2:518), and even regarding the first redeemer, the question was asked [by Moses], “Why have You harmed this nation?” (Exodus 5:22).

“The voice of my beloved, he comes! He springs over the mountains and jumps over the hills. My beloved is like a gazelle” (Song of Songs 2:8–9), “just as a gazelle appears and disappears . . . so too will the final redeemer appear and disappear from them. [How long did he disappear for? R. Tanhuma said, ‘Three months’ . . . So too will the final redeemer appear to them and disappear from them. And how long will he disappear for? Forty-five days]” (*Shir ha-Shirim Rabba, Seder* 2, 1 [9]:3).

There are times of revelation and there are times of concealment. Because of the folds in the landscape, we don’t see the gazelle, but he is still running. This is what we have received in a tradition from the Gaon: In Israel, there is no going backwards in the process of the return to Zion; from every trouble will come a salvation.

And we should know that the war over Jerusalem, of which our prophets spoke, can happen at the Suez Canal and also in Moscow. In a modern war, one doesn’t fight in the city, one fights from a great distance—just like the United States fights its war here or in Vietnam. “And the city was captured” (Zechariah 14:2) – this could possibly mean the capturing of the Suez Canal front or the Nafah Base in the Golan Heights. Because, from a certain perspective, when the enemy held the Golan Heights and the Suez Canal there was fear: indeed, the way to Jerusalem was open!

## 11.

Let us ask: Why did this war come about? What was there left to conquer? For what purpose does the war of Gog and Magog arise? To what end do they bring unknown countries from far in the north to conquer the Land of Israel? After the establishment of Israel's sovereignty war can only have one meaning: the refining and purifying of the Jewish people; to shock us in order to refine the nation. And indeed, the nation is currently experiencing a huge shock.

We're not referring to those hundreds and thousands, may they live long, who stood before the gates of death and witnessed miracles, and began to pray and to put on *tefillin*. Certainly, all these add up, they certainly have a great place in the heavenly [plan]. For certain, these [happenings] play a role in the development of the nation, even if these phenomena are only temporary.

But what we are referring to are processes; internal processes of directions of thought and feeling, of which we currently only see the tip of the iceberg: the process described in Hosea, "And she will pursue her lovers and not overtake them, and she shall seek them and not find them; and she shall say, 'I will go and return to my first Husband, for it was better for me than now'" (2:9). This is a long process. When all the world becomes a stranger, when "she will pursue her lovers and not overtake them," then the search for an essential identity will come about. What, in essence, is our strength? We stand against the entire world! Then a gathering to our essence will come about: What gives us the hope and trust that Israel will continue to exist? This will entail the search and an inward turning; a search for the reason for Jewish suffering, to understand the meaning of these wars and our destiny. And from this will flow an identification with the Jewish nation in a search for the Jewish uniqueness; a process of recognition of the difference between Israel and the nations will come about. This is the first condition for any spiritual upliftment.

It seems to me that in this war I merited to understand the approach of Ramban, in his *Torat ha-Adam* – that we do not eulogize those executed by a [non-Jewish] kingdom. The Talmud tells us that the Sages wished to eulogize R. Yehuda ben Bava, "Where is the righteous one? Where is the humble one? The student of Hillel!" However, "the circumstances did not allow for this, because one does not eulogize those executed by a [non-Jewish] kingdom" (Sanhedrin 11a). Rashi and all the *Rishonim* explain that we do not eulogize them because of our fear of the kingdom; that the kingdom will hear that we are eulogizing those whom it executed, and will then increase its persecutions of the Jews.

Therefore, a eulogy over those executed by a [non-Jewish] kingdom depends on the circumstances—if there is fear [of the kingdom’s reaction], or not. Ramban rules that one does not eulogize [those executed in this fashion]. Beit Yosef (Y.D. 345:6) challenges his position: Why should we not eulogize them because they were killed by the kingdom? The Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 47a–b) states that even an evil person who is executed for his wickedness is considered a *hasid*: “if one died unnaturally, it is an atonement for him . . . therefore, those executed by a [non-Jewish] kingdom gain atonement, since they are not executed by the law.”

However, when I had to eulogize one friend, then another, and then another, may God avenge their blood, I felt doubts: We are moving from the pain of an individual to the pain of the community, so how can I come to eulogize one individual amongst the collective of all those who have fallen, all of whom merited the highest levels (and no one can compare to them)—and I should speak of *one* person? It seems to me that here I understood Ramban’s approach—how is it possible to say “Where is the righteous one? Where is the humble one?” when together with him were killed so many, all of whom were righteous and humble? Even so, the halakha does not follow Ramban, and my mind settled.

Perhaps there is a special point to eulogize individuals in order to deepen our awareness that there is no numerical issue here. We do not speak of numbers, we speak of worlds—about each person who was a world on his own; and in order to increase the awareness of: “What is the difference between my son to that of my father-in-law”?<sup>13</sup> What is the difference between Israel and the nations? How does Israel relate to the life of an individual? How do we care for our captives? And as opposed to this, how our enemies speak of “millions of sacrifices”?

There is a virtue in eulogizing an individual; because the war requires of us to repair the damage done to the value we must place on each and every individual, and there is a difference between Israel and the nations, like the difference between light and dark. The Sages taught, “Like a rose amongst the thorns (Song of Songs 2:2) – every thorn which pierces the rose increases its bouquet.” Suffering reveals the essence of the Jewish people—and this is the simple meaning, and the deeper meaning of “through your blood you shall live . . . through your blood shall you live.”

13 *Berakhot* 7b discusses the difference between Esau, who in his fit of jealousy, threatened to kill his brother, Jacob; as opposed to Reuben, who though displaced by his brother, Joseph, tried to save his life. In the Gemara’s depiction, Leah, our foremother, is comparing the son of her father-in-law (Esau son of Isaac) to her son (Reuben), and praising the latter for his compassion.

## 12.

In this period, we need great faith, great trust, and strong nerves. We can learn how far-reaching these things are from King Saul. After Samuel anointed Saul as king, he commanded him:

And you will come down before me to Gilgal, and behold, I shall go down to you to offer up burnt offerings, and to slaughter peace-offerings. You must wait for seven days, until I come to you, and I will let you know what you will do (1 Samuel 10:8).

King Saul was caught in a situation far worse than ours on the eve of the Yom Kippur War.

And with Saul were two thousand in Mikhmash and in the mountain of Bethel, and one thousand were with Jonathan in Givah of Benjamin; and he sent the rest of the people, every man to his tent (1 Samuel 13:2).

Seemingly, their weapons were sticks and stones, as is said there,

Now, no metal-smith was to be found in all the Land of Israel, for the Philistines said, "Lest the Hebrews make swords or spears." . . . And it was on the day of war, that neither sword nor spear was found in the possession of all the people who were with Saul and Jonathan, only Saul and Jonathan his son had them (vv. 19, 22).

Against them, the Philistines were arrayed "to wage war with Israel, [with] thirty thousand chariots, and six thousand riders, and people as numerous as the sand on the seashore" (v. 5). This is an endless number of infantry!

And the men of Israel saw that they were in trouble, for the people were hard-pressed, and the nation hid in the caves, and in the thickets, in the rocky crags, and in the towers, and in the pits. And some Hebrews crossed the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilad, but Saul was still in Gilgal, and all the people hurried after him (vv. 6–7).

So Saul remained with six hundred men only (after the rest had fled) against thirty thousand chariots, six hundred cavalry riders and infantry like the sand of the sea. What else could Saul do? He could pray!

And Saul said, "Bring near to me the burnt offering and the peace offering." And he offered up the burnt offering. [And it was, when he finished offering up the burnt offering, that behold, Samuel came, and Saul went out toward him to greet him.] And Samuel

said, “What have you done?” And Saul said, “For I saw that the people had scattered from me, and you did not come at the appointed time of the days, and the Philistines are gathered in Mikhmash. And I said [to myself], ‘Now the Philistines will come down against me to Gilgal, and I have not yet made supplication before Hashem.’ And I held back! [And then I brought up the burnt offering]” (vv. 9–12).

“*Gevalt!* I haven’t *davened* yet!”

“And I held back!” – The Targum translates this as “I strengthened myself.” And only after that, “I brought up the burnt offering.” For seven days, he held on with all his spiritual capacity, with six hundred men, armed with sticks and stones; and at the last moment, he lost his nerve and he prayed! But this was a *tefilla* from despair.

“[Only after waiting for you,] I offered up the burnt offering.” And Samuel said to Saul, “You have done foolishly; you have not observed the commandment of the Lord your God, which He commanded you. God would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now, your kingdom will not continue; He has sought for Himself a man after His heart, and God has appointed him to be a ruler over His people, for you have not done what Hashem commanded you” (I Samuel 13:12–14).

The ability to stand firm, with such strong nerves, is what is demanded from leaders. One has to strengthen oneself with faith and trust, as is stated at the end of the Song of *Ha’azinu*:<sup>14</sup>

For I raise up My hand to heaven, and say, “As I live forever.” When I sharpen the blade of My sword, and My hand grasps judgment, I will bring vengeance upon My adversaries and repay those who hate Me. I will intoxicate My arrows with blood, and My sword will consume flesh, from the blood of the slain and the captives, from the first breach of the enemy (Deuteronomy 32:40–42).

The *Sifre* says, “Because of what they did to the captives from my nation” (*Ha’azinu* 27).

14 In these verses we are warned that our enemies will harm our captured soldiers, and that withstanding the terrible psychological pressure this exerts, will demand faith, trust, and nerves of steel. In the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War it became apparent that more than 80 Israeli soldiers, who had been taken captive, were subsequently killed by the Egyptians and Syrians—many Israelis had seen photos of their live, captured relatives, broadcast by the Syrians and Egyptians, but those relatives never returned from captivity. This was a cause of terrible anxiety for many Israelis. See the IDF documentation at: <https://tinyurl.com/mr5fxcpx3>.

Sing praise, you nations, for His people! For He will avenge the blood of His servants, inflict revenge upon His adversaries, and appease His land and His people (Deuteronomy 32:43).

### 13.

We are commanded to live with the faith that there will be no retreat since the beginning of the return to Zion. There are temporary concealments, but no retreat. All the paths—those paved and unpaved—lead us to the redemption of Israel. [As we learn in *Kol ha-Tor*, reporting the teachings of the Vilna Gaon:]

[In practice, there are seven ways for the *at'halta di-ge'ula* to occur, with the help of Heaven. The first way is: birth-pangs and pleasantness.] We must know from the beginning that the redemption will come by way of birth-pangs and pleasantness, as hinted at in the verse “birth-pangs for Joseph” ([A wordplay on] Ezekiel 47:13). It will come with the attribute of Divine Justice through an awakening from below. The “Footsteps of the Messiah” come with birth-pangs, and sometimes even indirectly. On the other hand, in contrast, the attribute of Divine Loving-kindness is present, from the perspective of “[Israel] stretched out his right hand [...] and placed it on Ephraim’s head” Genesis 48:14). We must know from the beginning, that during the period of the “Footsteps of the Messiah,” from every trouble, redemption emerges; and redemption will emerge from the trouble, as it states in the verse, “it is a time of trouble for Jacob; but out of it he will be saved” (Jeremiah 30:7). The Gaon, in his commentary on Habakkuk, regarding the verse, “I will rest on the day of distress” (3:16), states that this sentence refers to the Messiah son of Joseph, and that we should know beforehand that the Land of Israel is obtained through suffering. But through suffering, the land is actually obtained. The “Footsteps of the Messiah” come with disturbances and obstacles brought on by the Governing Angel of Esau as well as by Armilus, the Governing Angel of the Mixed Multitude. Finally, however, the Angel of Esau will fall into the hands of the Angel of Joseph, as is found in the *Midrash Tanhuma (Ki Tetze 10)*, [and this will occur] with the help of Messiah son of David, as happened when Judah saved Joseph: “out of the strong came forth sweetness” (Judges 14:14) and “He will accept the work of our hands” (Deuteronomy 33:11). Therefore, heaven forbid that we retreat when there is some difficulty, God forbid; or when there is an obstacle in the way of our service. We must



trust that out of that [obstacle], Jacob will be saved, and from the straits we will reach the breadth of God (*Kol ha-Tor* 1:13).

“You are faithful, Lord, our God, and Your words are faithful, and not a single one of your words will return empty.” Not even *one* word of Yours!

For, just as the rain and the snow fall from the heavens, and it does not return there, unless it has watered the earth and fructified it and made it grow, and has given seed to the sower and bread to the eater; so will be My word that comes out from My mouth: it will not return to Me empty, unless it has done what I desire and has achieved what I sent it to do (Isaiah 55:10–11).

One should live with this type of faith. And anyone who comes into contact with a Torah scholar should draw faith from the very encounter itself. Faith should shine from him, and it should shine into the soul of every person. We will end with the words of the prophet, “I have brought near My righteousness, it shall not go astray, and My salvation shall not delay, and I will give salvation in Zion, to Israel, My glory” (Isaiah 46:13).

— *Translated and annotated by Ramon Widmonte*