

Good Shabbos, everyone.

Thank you to the *drasha* sponsors, Hillel and Dena Soclof, who are sponsoring in memory of Hillel's father, Abe Soclof, Avraham Abba ben Shmaryahu, z'l, whose *yahrtzeit* is the 27<sup>th</sup> of Elul. May his *neshama* have an *aliya*, and may they be rewarded for their support of the shul with good health, *bracha* and *hatzlacha*.

This is **Shabbos Iyun Tefilla**, a Shabbos dedicated to focus on the purpose and function of tefilla. It was the dream of a special man in our *kehilla*, Mr. Harry Rashbaum, z'l, that, once a year, all shuls in Baltimore would speak about this important topic. Through his hard work over the years, he made his dream a reality. May this *tefilla* initiative be a *zechus* for his *neshama*.

As frum Jews, we dedicate a lot of time to *tefilla*. We are told to daven three times a day, as well as in times of crisis. The Jewish people have been coming together for *tefilla* since the early days of our nation. During this pandemic, many people told me that, although shuls were closed, it was *tefilla* that kept them sane and helped them get through this challenging ordeal.

**Dr. David Pelcovitz**, in an article in *YU Torah To Go*, called "Coping with Loss and Terror: Jewish and Psychological Perspectives," writes:

*The ability to cope with upsetting situations by soothing one's self, is central to being able to cope with situations of crisis or fear. This includes efforts to calm oneself by praying, taking a walk, listening to music, or trying to relax. Turning to God to answer our prayers is perhaps the most powerful form of coping. In addition to the obvious spiritual benefits, the psychological benefits of prayer include the comforting knowledge that there is something that we can actively do in the face of events that are otherwise out of our control. A number of recent studies have found that prayer is associated with improved ability to cope with painful medical conditions as well as making a positive emotional adjustment following major surgery.*

But as personal as tefilla is, our formal prayer is structured to ideally be done as a community, to be done with others, and in the presence of others.

Furthermore, the **Magen Avraham**, in siman 46, quotes the **Ariza"l** as saying that before davening one should have in mind to accept the *Mitzva* of *כמוך*, *ואהבת לרעך כמוך*, love your neighbor as yourself.

מגן אברהם סימן מו הקדמה: קודם בואו לבה"כ יאמר ואני ברוב חסדך וכו' ובכניסתו יאמר בבית אלהים נהלך ברגש (כתבים) קודם תפלת שחרית יקבל עליו מ"ע של ואהבת לרעך כמוך [הכוונות]:

Similarly, **Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel** was once asked by a Talmid what he should think about during his *tefillos* on Rosh Hashana. The questioner expected a long *drasha* in response and instead received just two words—"someone else."

How does that work? How can we *daven* for others? Why is our *tefilla* recited as a community?

Parshas Nitzavim provides some insights...

פרשת נצבים דברים פרק כט פסוק ט - יא

(ט) אַתֶּם נֹצְבִים הַיּוֹם פְּלִלְתֶּם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם רְאִשֵׁיכֶם שְׁבִטֹתֶיכֶם וְשִׁטְרֵיכֶם כָּל אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל:  
(י) טַפְּכֶם וְשִׁיכֶם וְגֵרְךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבְּךָ מִחִטָּב עַד שְׂאֵב מִיַּמִּיד:  
(יא) לְעִבְרְךָ בְּבִרְיֹת יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וּבְאֵלֹתָיו אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ כָּרַת עִמָּךְ הַיּוֹם:

*You stand this day, all of you, before the LORD your God—your tribal heads, your elders and your officials, all the men of Israel,*

*your children, your wives, even the stranger within your camp, from woodchopper to waterdrawer—  
to enter into the covenant of the LORD your God, which the LORD your God is concluding with you this day*

Moshe Rabbeinu addresses everyone who was alive at that time about entering a covenant with Hashem, highlighting the fact that **every Jew is included**. But then he says something quite shocking...

(יג) וְלֹא אִתְּכֶם לְבַדְכֶם אֲנֹכִי כָרַת אֶת־הַבְּרִית הַזֹּאת וְאֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים הַזֵּאת:  
(יד) כִּי אֶת־אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁנֹו פֹה עִמָּנוּ עַמְּד הַיּוֹם לִפְנֵי ה' אֶלְקֵינוּ וְאֶת אֲשֶׁר אֵינָנו פֹּה עִמָּנוּ הַיּוֹם:

*I make this covenant, not with you alone, but both with those who are standing here with us this day before the LORD our God and with those who are not with us here this day.*

How does this work? How can a covenant be made with those who are not yet born? The answer is that the covenant was not made with individuals, or even a group of individuals—it was made was an entity called Klal Yisrael.

**Rav Schwab** has a powerful insight into the nature of Klal Yisrael.

כן יש לעיין במה שאנו אומרים בהגדה "לא את אבותינו בלבד גאל הקב"ה אלא אף אותנו גאל" שלכאורה נראה כמליצה נאה, שהרי אנחנו בעצמינו לא יצאנו ממצרים.  
אבל באמת לא כן הוא, כי אני יצאתי ממצרים ממש כפשוטה. ויתבאר ע"פ משל ממה שרואים בגוף האדם, שכידוע שכל בשרו ועצמותיו הם מצורפים מחלקים קטנטנים שמתחלפים תמיד ד שאפשר לומר על האדם שהוא משתנה לגמרי ממן לזמן וכל חלקי הגוף של אדם מבוגר הם שונים מהגוף שהיה לו בילדותו. ועם כל זה יוכל האדם לומר בזקנותו "ראה את היד הזאת שלי שנשברה בילדותי" שעדיין היא היא אותה היד, כי זוהי תכונתה של הבריה החיה שאף שיש בה כסדר שינוי וחליפין מ"מ כל חלקיה מתייחסים אליה כאילו לא נשתנו. וכן גבי כנסת ישראל, שהיא בריה חיה אחודה הכוללת את כל הדורות ולכן גם אנחנו יוכלים לומר על עצמינו ש"עשה ה' לי בצאתי ממצרים" פשוטו שמשמעו, כי אותו כלל ישראל שיצא ממצרים עדיין חי וקיים. וגם אני בהיותי חלק חי מהכלל כולו הרי גם אני יצאתי ממצרים.  
*We must investigate the statement in the Pesach haggada "God did not only save our ancestors, but he also recued us from Mitzrayim. Is this accurate? At first glance, it seems like a poetic statement, not to be taken literally, but upon further reflection, it is a precise statement, as we did actually leave Mitzrayim. This can be explained with the following example. The human body is made up of cells that are constantly regenerating...to the point that physically a person completely changes; his body as an adult is made up of different cells from when he was a child. But if a person would point to his hand as an adult and say this is the hand I broke in my youth—no one would protest and say those cells were not in existence—it is a different hand. We consider it the same hand. It is part of a person who has changed—but he is still the same core being. This is true of the Jewish people as well. All generations past, present and future, are part of that living being known as Kneses Yisrael—and therefore as members of the Jewish people, we too can say **that we left Mitzrayim**---that living being, that klal, known as Knesses Yisrael is alive and well—and we are a part of it...*

**Rabbeinu Bachai** offers a similar perspective on the question. He says that the reason the covenant could be entered into for future generations is because past generations are like the roots of a tree, and the children are the branches that come from the roots. The roots can accept responsibility for the entirety of the tree...even what has not yet emerged, as it is the same tree.

רבינו בחיי דברים (פרשת נצבים) פרק כט פסוק יג

(יג) וְלֹא אִתְּכֶם לְבַדְכֶם. כלומר שבדור הזה אנכי כורת את הברית ואת האלה, כי אתם עמנו עומדים היום לפני ה' אלהינו, אלא אפילו את אשר איננו פה עמנו היום, כלומר בברית הזאת. ואמר כן: לפי שהאב שרש, והבנים הם ענפים העתידים לצאת מכח השרש, ועל כן היה יכול השרש להביא באלה את הדורות הבאים.

In 1925, **Rav Kook** wrote a letter (*Mishpat Kohen* 124) to Rav Meir Don Plotzky, after the latter sent him a copy of his seforim on Chumash called *Klei Chemda*.

**שיש בציבור של ישראל קדושה ומציאות כללית**, שאינה נערכת כלל כלפי החלק של כל פרט, והיא עומדת למעלה מגדרי חלוקה, ובשביל כך קרבנות ציבור צריכין להיות משל ציבור דוקא, שזהו ענין הקדושה של הכלל כולו... ועיקר קדושת תורה שבע"פ, שהיא תורת הברית של ישראל, הוא מפני קדושת הכלל שניכר בה יותר

He notes that the Jewish people have a *kedusha* as a *klal* beyond the sum of its parts. They join together to produce a holy entity called *Klal Yisrael*.

The **Chazon Ish** said that our ability to *daven* for others and affect them through our *tefillos* is based on the premise that we are all part of one living being called *Klal Yisrael*

חזון איש סוף אורח חיים עמ' 516

דברים ה', כ"ו מי יתן וגו', המקום ב"ה מניח את הבחירה ביד האדם, אבל האדם רשאי להכריח את רעהו לעבודתו ית' בין בכפייה בין בפיתוי ולא הוי ביטול בחירה כיון דהמעשה עושה בבחירה וכל ישראל כאיש אחד והיינו מי יתן שיהיה בין צדיקי הדור משתדלים לקרב לב כל העם לעבודתו ית', אבל המקום ב"ה אינו נותן בלבם את הקירוב דא"כ לא יתחייב הדבר לברואי, אמנם אם יש מתפלל לפניו ית' על הקירוב ותפלתו נשמעת, מתיחס הקירוב שעושה הקב"ה לברואיו כיון שנעשה ע"י תפלת נברא... .

And as integral parts of this entity, our actions have an effect on the rest of the *Klal*, and past generations have a profound impact on future generations, just as the choices we make impact in our youth impact us in our adult years.

**Rav Chaim Volozhin** in his *perush* on *Pirkei Avos*, *Ruach Chaim*, discusses the impact past generations can have on future generations, when he explains the use of the word *avinu* in the context of Avraham Avinu's ten tests. Every test Avraham passed helped his descendants with all the same struggles...

עשרה נסיונות נתנסה אברהם אבינו. כאן אמר אברהם אבינו ולעיל אמר מנח ועד אברהם. ולא אמר אבינו ירצה בזה על פי מה שכתוב (משלי ז, כ) מתהלך בתומו צדיק אשרי בניו אחריו. כי כמה מדות שהצדיק טרח ויגע להשיגם. לבניו אחריו המה כטבע מוטבע. ובקצת יגיעה יגיעו לזה. כמו שנראה בחוש שרבים מעמי ארץ מהיהודים מוסרים את עצמם על קידוש השם. והוא מוטבע בנו מאבינו אברהם שמסר נפשו לאור כשדים על אמונתו. וכן כל העשרה נסיונות היו להישיר הדרך לפנינו וכן ההתעוררות לאדם פתאום לילך לארץ הקודש הוא מנסיון "לך לך" וקבלת כל דעבדין משמאי לטב מנסיון הרעב שלא רהר אחר מדות השם יתברך...

*"Avraham Avinu was tested with ten nisyonos" (Pirkei Avos 5:3). Here it says, "Avraham Avinu" (our forefather), while above it says, "There were ten generations from Avraham until No'ach," and it doesn't call him 'Avinu.' We can explain this by applying the verse "A tzaddik walks in his sincerity; happy are his children after him" (Mishlei 20:7). How many mitzvos did a tzaddik work hard and toil to achieve, which to his children after him are engraved in their nature - and with just a little bit of effort they reach the same level! As we see in real life, so many Jews show real acts of Jewishness. Even simple laymen give up their lives for kiddush Hashem. This is something that we inherited from our forefather Avraham, who was willing to give up his life in Ur Kasdim for the sake of his faith. All of the ten tests smoothed the path for us. Also, how many people get a sudden urge to go to the Holy Land, to Eretz Yisrael! This is from the test of Lech Lecha ("Go out from your land"). And as for a Jew's ability to accept everything that happens from Heaven as good, this comes from the nisayon of the famine, when Avraham did not question God's commands.*

The choices we make impact the *Klal*, and future generations of Jews.

I recently participated in a rabbinic session with Dr. Pelcovitz, who was speaking about the field of epigenetics (specifically related to effects of using marijuana). Epigenetics is the study of factors such as diet, lifestyle choices and behaviors, and stress that can change the health not

only of the people who are exposed to them directly, but also the health of their descendants. Epigenetic experts believe that the environmental conditions and life experiences of parents, grandparents, and even great-grandparents can, in a way, flip "on/off switches" on their genes, thus changing the genetic code of their descendants. In this way, new genetic traits can appear *in a single generation* and be passed on to children, grandchildren, and beyond.

Similarly, our life choices affect the entity called Klal Yisrael. And our tefillos must reflect that.

Similarly, **Rav Dessler** wrote:

קונטרס הבחירה עמ' 115

וכל בחירה שבוחר האדם, עושה רושם בכל מצבו לכל ימי חייו, אם מעט ואם הרבה, אם לטוב ואם למוטב. ולא רק בו, אלא באשר יעשה לחינוך בניו, וכל אשר יתפתח מזה עד סוף כל דורותיו. וכל אדם פועל על סביביו, ע"כ רושם בחירתו יהיה גם על כל סביביו, וכך על כל סביבות דורותיו, וסביבות סביותיהם, עד סוף כל הדורות...

*Every choice a person makes has an effect on his entire life, whether small or large, good or bad. It does not only affect himself, but his descendants, until the end of generations...*

**Sivan Rahav Meir** in #Parasha (pp. 298 and 299) writes:

*In one of the international discussions about the 1948 "Partition Plan", Ben Gurion asked advice of Yitzhak Tabenkin, a founder of the Kibbutz Movement. Tabenkin asked for a day in which to consider his response, saying he wanted to take counsel from two individuals. A day later, Tabenkin urged Ben Gurion to refuse the offer. Ben Gurion said that he accepted Tabenkin's decision and asked whom he discussed it with. Tabenkin answered: "From two people, from my grandfather, who died ten years ago, and from my grandson, who is not yet born". In his answer, Tabenkin showed that he bears responsibility for the past and the future, even for people who are not physically present.*

This is a perspective that we are meant to develop by davening as a tzibbur; our responsibility to others; the past as well as the future.

Elul is an acronym for many important phrases. Most famous is אני לדודי ודודי לי, highlighting our relationship and responsibilities towards Hashem. It also stands for איש לרעהו ומתנות לאביונים, Our responsibilities to one another. But it can also stand for את לבבך ואת לבב זרעך, teaching is that the choices we make today impact the future. May we make the right choices...and dedicate our lives to Hashem and make this world a more perfect place.

Let us always remember that we are part of a Klal and we have responsibility to one another. And let us daven for the success and well-being of our neighbors, community members, and all of Klal Yisrael.

Wishing everyone a ksiva vachasima tova and a sweet year filled with of happiness and good health, bracha and hatzlacha.