LEHRHAUS Over Shabbat

Bamidbar

Vol. 8, Issue 38 • 1 Sivan 5784 / June 7, 2024

Amidst the war unfolding in Israel, we have decided to go forward and continue publishing a variety of articles to provide meaningful opportunities for our readership to engage in Torah during these difficult times.

Lehrhaus Over Shabbat for the month of Sivan is sponsored by Lauren and David Lunzer to commemorate the 27th yahrzeit of David's mother, Beila Raizel bas HaRav Binyamin, on 28 Sivan.

Sponsorships for future editions of Lehrhaus over Shabbat are available at https://thelehrhaus.com/sponsor-lehrhaus-shabbos/

LIVING IN AN OLD BOOK WITH POET HAIM GOURI (1923-2018)

Wendy Zierler is Sigmund Falk Professor of Modern Jewish Literature and Feminist Studies at HUC-JIR in New York.

Haim Gouri, "I Live at This Time in an Old Book"

(2015, Rona Kenan, music)[1]

[1] Kenan's musical adaptation is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bGzhRiHvyGI.

I Live at this Time in an Old Book

I live at this time in an old book.
I live at this time in the right environment
That exports oranges and sighs
To half the world.

אני גר כעת בספר ישן
אֲנִי גָּר כָּעֵת בְּסֵפֶר יָשָׁן.
אֲנִי גָּר כָּעֵת בַּסְּבִיבָה הַנְּכוֹנָה
הַמְיַצֵּאת תַּפּוּזִים וַאֲנָחוֹת
לְמַחֲצִית הָעוֹלָם.

I live right now in a white city
Filled with black dreams.
I live amid rare predictions
And unexpected conditional sentences.

אֲנִי גָּר כָּעֵת בְּעִיר לְבָנָה
וּמְלֵאַת חֲלוֹמוֹת שְׁחוֹרִים.
אֲנִי גָּר בֵּין הַשְׁעָרוֹת נְדִירוֹת
וּמִשְׁפְּטֵי תְּנַאי בִּלְתִּי-מְשֻׁעָרִים.

I move like a passing shadow[2]
On a street unlike any other street,
Amid hearts on the verge of breaking[3]
Toward the kingdom always coming in the future.

אֲנִי נָע כְּצֵל עוֹבֵר
בִּרְחוֹב שֶׁאֵין דּוֹמֶה לוֹ
בָּרְחוֹבוֹת,
בֵּין לְבָבוֹת הַמְחַשְׁבִים לְהִשָּׁבֵר
אֶל הַמַּלְכוּת הָעֲתִידָה תָּמִיד
לָבוֹא.

I move between holy people
And the lovesick.[4]
I see women and men
Returning from the world to come.

אֲנִי נָע בֵּין אֲנָשִׁים קְדוֹשִׁים
וְחוֹלֵי אַהֲבָה.
אֲנִי רוֹאֶה נָשִׁים וַאֲנָשִׁים
הַשָּׁבִים מִן הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא.

[2] Cf. Psalms 144:4.

[3] Cf. Jonah 1:4.

[4] Cf. Song of Songs 5:8.

Every Tuesday at the end of morning *minyan* at my local synagogue in Riverdale, New York, I offer a mini-class entitled "*Shir Hadash shel Yom*"—"New Poem of the Day," in which I teach a modern Hebrew poem that speaks either to matters of the day or of prayer. Over the past seven months in the "*Shir Hadash,*" we have shuttled back and forth between poems and songs written several decades ago and those written just recently in response to the October 7 attack. Many of the older poems date back to the 1948 War and yet have felt eerily relevant and timely. In recent months, it has felt as if time has folded back on itself, the antisemitism of earlier generations and the attacks on the once fledgling State of Israel taking on a terrifyingly resurgent new life. How could it be, we wonder, that all this time has passed, and yet here we are again, back in tragic, insecure times? Doesn't anything ever get any better?

Haim Gouri, famous for providing the lyrics for Yitzhak Rabin's favorite song "*Ha-Reʿut,*" is a bridge figure connecting the old and the more recent because of when he came into prominence (the 1948 War), how long he lived, and how he continued to write and publish well into his 90s. Gouri died in 2018, so he has not been around to lyricize this present war. But almost to the very end of his life he was writing and publishing; the above poem by Gouri explicitly engages longevity and old age as a way of bewailing and offering perspective, even hope, in the face of the ongoing woes of Israel and the Jewish people.

The poem is worth reading, if nothing else, for its opening line that speaks both to issues of old age and the Jewish/Israeli relationship with textuality. If our bodies can be likened to books that are opened and read, the body that Haim Gouri inhabited at the time of this poem's writing—when he was 92 years old—was indeed old. The State of Israel, too, though a relatively young country, resides in a very old and established (*nekhonah*) historical environment, endowing every experience and event with layers of historical significance and resonance. And insofar as our classical sources have recorded and continue to inform the significance of this environment, the entire country and its contemporary inhabitants live "in an old book," rendering the people and the land old and new simultaneously.

Gouri's opening declaration that he lives in an old book also recalls, for me, an illustration that appeared at the head of a 1920 story by S.Y. Agnon entitled "*Maʿaseh Rabbi Gadiel ha-Tinok*" ("The Tale of Little Rabbi Gadiel," 1920/1925).[5] Agnon's story, which served as the basis of Sadie Rose Weilerstein's *K'tonton* series, is a Jewish version of "The History of Tom Thumb," an Arthurian legend dating back to 1620. The story describes a plowman and his wife who yearn so deeply for a child that when visited by the great magician Merlin (who is dressed up like a beggar, like Elijah the prophet in so many Jewish folktales), they say they'd be happy if that child were no larger than his father's thumb. This is

[5] Included in S.Y. Agnon, *Elu Ve-Elu*, vol. 2 (Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1959), 416-420.

exactly what Merlin gives them, a tiny son named Tom (a name close in sound to Thumb). Agnon's "*R. Gadiel*" transforms the tiny, adventurous, and wily Arthurian Tom Thumb into a young Torah prodigy who also serves as an advocate (and martyr, as *gedi-El* translates to "lamb of God") for Jews in times of persecution.

Like his Arthurian model, R. Gadiel is vulnerable to dangers and given to mishaps: falling into a vial of Hanukkah oil, or sitting atop and accidentally getting shut into the pages of a book that his father had been studying, as seen in the illustration included at the top of the original 1920 printing of the story.[6]

ר' גדיאל התינוק נולד לאביו בזכות התורה, שהיה אביו מלמד לתינוקות מישראל בנעוריו. וכשיצא ר' גדיאל לאויר העולם, היה קטן כל־כך, עד שלא היה ניכר, אם בן־אדם הוא.

Against all odds, and despite his tininess and vulnerability—a metaphor for the minority status of the Jewish people as a whole—R. Gadiel saves his family and people on Passover from a murderous blood-libel plot and lives on miraculously—never entirely growing up or old—ever ready to advocate for the Jewish people against their evil detractors. As such, he lives in an old book of Jewish suffering, particularity, and purpose.

The speaker in Haim Gouri's poem takes on a similar role—living in the old book/land of Jewish history—that is constantly threatened and yet continues to dream of redemption.

As a reflection on living in this old country/book, Gouri's poem comprises a study of opposites. His speaker lives in a country that exports oranges and sighs, in a white city with black dreams.

High Holiday liturgy, with its contrasting intimations of mortality as well as its hopes for the New Year and for the Kingdom of God, hovers over the poem—especially in the third stanza, where the poet pictures himself moving like a "*tzel over*" ("passing shadow"), an allusion to Psalms 144:4 as quoted in the "*Unetaneh Tokef*" prayer. He describes himself as moving along peerless streets, among hearts on the verge of breaking (*ha-mehashvim le-hishaver*), an allusion to the condition of the boat on which the prophet Jonah escapes in the midst of a dangerous storm

[6] The illustration, attributed to S. Raskin, appeared in *Miklat* 4:10-12 (1920): 406.

sent by God (Jonah 1:4). Here, of course, it is not a boat but hearts that are continually breaking from disappointed hopes and yet always hoping and moving toward an *Aleinu*-like repaired and perfected Commonwealth.

As to the meaning of the last stanza of this poem, which refers to seeing men and women who have returned from "*olam ha-ba*," I'll offer a few different possible interpretations. The poem was published in 2015, a year after the kidnapping of three Israeli teenagers—Naftali Fraenkel, Gilad Shaer, and Eyal Yifrah—on June 12, 2014, and the launching of the 2014 Gaza War on July 8, labeled "Operation Protective Edge." Reading about that conflict ten years later feels very much like living in an old book.

Is the image of men and women returning from *olam ha-ba* a reference to young male and female soldiers somehow returning safely from the mortal dangers of the battlefield?

Is it a statement of disillusionment on the part of those like Gouri, who had always nursed hopes for peace and a future world to come but were now facing a national turning-away from any expectation of a two-state solution? The results of the 2015 early election, which sent Netanyahu back to power, might support that reading.

Is the speaker marveling here that, despite the renewed conflict and worry, holy, lovesick Israel (as in the imagery of *Yedid Nefesh*) somehow manages to replenish its spirit on a weekly basis through the "*me'ein olam ha-ba*," the like-the-world-to-come of Shabbat, with men and women returning weekly to their workaday lives and worries?

Is Gouri reflecting on the tenuous nature of life, especially for someone his age, where health emergencies repeatedly place you on that razor-thin line between this world or the next? Each time an elderly person is sent to the hospital and then discharged might be seen like a return to this world from the world to come.

Or perhaps, reflecting on his own mortality and the life he has lived inside of the book(s) of classical Jewish tradition and Hebrew poetry, Gouri is acknowledging the influence and inspiration of all the dead male and female poets and expressing the hope that his own poems will do the same for others?

Like I said, I call my weekly class "*Shir Hadash shel Yom*" ("New Poem of the Day"), but perhaps in honor of Gouri's poem, I should rename it "*Shir Yashan shel Yom*" ("Old Poem of the Day"), so as to acknowledge, similarly, with gratitude, the opportunity at this time, to live in the old book of Gouri's poetry, and to receive, if just briefly, his message from the world to come.

Editor's Note: This article was originally published in May 2020.

THE NIGHTLY CRY, THE SONG OF TORAH

Yaakov S. Weinstein is a physicist at the MITRE Corporation and is the author of the Torah from Narnia blog.

Lamentations

> Arise! Call out (*roni*) at night! … Pour out your heart like water before God! Raise your hands to Him for the soul of your youth, who are enwrapped in hunger on every corner. (Lamentations 2:19)

The anguished call of the prophet Jeremiah (author of Lamentations, as per *Bava Batra* 15a) echoes off the cobblestones of Jerusalem. "God has left us, His Temple is destroyed! Zion lays in ruins, her youth starving in the streets! How can you sleep? How can you stay still? Pour out your heart like water, raise your hands in prayer!"

Yet, Jeremiah's choice of verb for the verse in Lamentations is surprising. Rather than telling the people to call out (*za'aki* or *tza'aki*), cry (*bekhi*), or even awaken (*oori*), Jeremiah says *roni.* This word comes from the noun *rinah*, song, as in the verse, "Then our mouths shall be filled with laughter, and our tongues, with song (*rinah*)" (Psalms 126:2). Why? *Rinah* connotes positivity and joy, surely not appropriate for the dead of night amongst the ruins of Jerusalem!

The classical commentators were cognizant of this problem and suggest that the translation of *rinah* as song is incorrect, or at least incomplete. Ibn Ezra claims that the root *rinah* simply means to raise one's voice, be it in song or in elegy. The Midrash (*Sifrei Devarim* 26) lists *rinah* as one of the formulations used for prayer, which may reflect thanksgiving or supplication. Both explanations fit our expectation of the verse.

Jeremiah calls upon a people struck by catastrophe to reject acceptance and complacency. There are widows crying in the streets, there are orphaned children wailing in the darkness. Empathize with them, feel their pain. God is no longer close by to comfort them. Arise! Raise your voices in prayer to God!

Nighttime Torah Study

> R' Yohanan said: the song (*rinah*) of Torah is only at night, as it says, "Arise! Call out (*rinah*) at night!" (*Leviticus Rabbah* 19)

The Sages speak in superlatives of one who spends the night time hours engaged in Torah study. Such people are as the priests who served in the Temple (*Menahot* 110a), they are blessed with favor and grace (*Avodah Zarah* 3b), only they can acquire the crown of Torah (*Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Talmud Torah* 3:13). Why then, does R' Yohanan see fit to use a verse in Lamentations to highlight the uniqueness of a nighttime Torah vigil? Or, reformulating the question from the

opposite perspective, how does the study of Torah at night fit the call of Jeremiah?

Previously, we had interpreted the verb *rinah* as raising one's voice in mourning and elegy, and as calling out in prayer and supplication. Jeremiah certainly wants the people to mourn for the destruction of the Temple and to pray for the starving youth fainting in the streets of Jerusalem. For Torah study to fit with Jeremiah's exhortation it must fulfill these functions. Can the learning of Torah manifest mourning and prayer?

Torah Study as Mourning

The suggestion that Torah study can manifest or fulfill mourning is, on its face, not only incorrect but incongruous. One is prohibited from learning Torah while in mourning because it is a source of joy (*Mo'ed Katan* 21a and Rashi s.v. "v-assur"). Yet, R' Soloveitchik asserts that the learning of Torah on Tish'ah be-Av in order to appreciate and consequences of the events on that day, is a fulfillment of mourning:

> While the study of Torah is prohibited on Tish'ah be-Av, the study of the events that happened on Tish'ah be-Av is not only permitted but is, in itself, a fulfillment of *avelut* (mourning). Understanding what Tish'ah be-Av means - a retrospective reexperiencing and reliving of the events it commemorates, appreciating its meaning in Jewish history and particularly the consequences and results of the catastrophe that struck us so many years ago that it commemorates - is identical to *kiyyum avelut* (a fulfillment of mourning). On Tish'ah be-Av *avelut* means to understand what happened, and that understanding or intellectual analysis is to be achieved… in the light of both *Torah she-bi-khtav* and *Torah she-be-al peh*, the Written and Oral Law. These are our only frames of reference… (R' Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Lord is Righteous in All His Ways*)

R' Soloveitchik's approach is most appropriate for Tish'ah be-Av, the actual day of the Temple's destruction. On that day, we must relive the events of the destruction of the Temple and its historical consequences of exile, antisemitism, and Holocaust. However, the ramifications of the Temple's destruction from a Torah perspective are much more broad and perhaps just as tragic. With the destruction of the Temple, huge swaths of Torah lost their purpose. Hundreds of commandments were rendered irrelevant. Most of the mishnaic orders of *Zeraim* (Seeds), *Kodshim* (Holy Things), and *Taharot* (Purities) suddenly became obsolete. How do we mourn this loss? How can we reexperience and relive a de-actualization of Torah? Where is our fulfillment of mourning for God's word that now has no ready audience?

R' Yohanan sees in the lament of Jeremiah not only a call to mourn, but instructions on how to mourn. Just like on Tish'ah be-Av we mourn via

the study of Torah, so too every evening. On Tish'ah be-Av, our mourning is concentrated on the specific events of the day and its consequences as recorded by our Sages. The rest of the year, our mourning encompasses Torah life as a whole and its incompleteness in a post-Temple world. On Tish'ah be-Av, specific portions of Torah allow us to relive the destruction of the Temple and its meaning in Jewish history. The rest of the year, by exploring all of Torah, the blueprint of Creation, we can begin to fathom the beauty of God's actual plan for the universe, not the shadow-world we currently inhabit. With this comprehension we can truly mourn over the destruction of the Temple. Only through Torah can we realize our loss and mourn what we once had.

However, R' Yohanan goes a step further. It is not only that the learning of Torah constitutes mourning. Jeremiah's instruction of Torah study as the way to mourn is also an elixir.

> "A song of ascents. Behold, bless God, all servants of God who stand nightly in the house of God," (Psalms 134:1). What does the verse mean "at night?"[1] R' Yohanan says, "These are the Torah scholars who engage in Torah at night. The verse considers them as having performed the Temple service." (*Menahot* 110a)

The Temple may have been destroyed, its service may have disappeared. But one who studies Torah can accrue the same merit and foster the same relationship with God as those who performed this service.

Torah Study as Prayer

> Solomon stood before the altar of God in front of the entire community of Israel and spread his palms towards Heaven. And he said… You should turn, my God, to the prayer and supplication of Your servant, to hear the calls (*rinah*) and prayer which Your servant prays before You today. (Kings I 8:22-23, 28)

King Solomon's address to the people of Israel at the dedication of the Temple ends with a lengthy prayer to God. This prayer entreats God that the Temple should fulfill its divine purpose: to be the place where all humanity turns to pray to God, and where all are assured that God has heard their prayers. As described by King Solomon, the Temple is God's house where those who seek go to find answers, and those who are pained go to find comfort. Can such a connection still exist in a post-Temple era?

> Rabbi Elazar said: From the day the Temple was destroyed an iron wall

[1] This verse is inherently problematic as it implies that there is service to be done in the Temple at night. While it is true that at certain times there is, in fact, some service that is either left over for night or begins at night (R' Amos Hakham in *Da'at Mikra* to Psalms suggests that the verse referred to those who would come early to the Temple on holidays), the main part of the Temple service was certainly by day.

> separates Israel from their Father in Heaven, as it says (Ezekiel 4:3) "And take for yourself an iron griddle, and set it as an iron wall between yourself and the city…it will be a sign for the house of Israel." (*Berakhot* 32b)

The destruction of the Temple severed the prayer channel between God and man. Obstructing open communications with God is a wall, blocking Israel's prayers from reaching His Heavenly abode. Can our prayer even penetrate this wall?

The answer is no, the wall is impenetrable. Even God, as it were, can only, "Watch out the windows, and peer through the cracks" (Song of Songs 2:9). Yet, at times, God will, as it were, tunnel through the wall. He will frequent the synagogue and attend the communal prayer service:

> Ravin bar Rav Adda said in the name of R' Yitzḥak: From where is it derived that the Holy One, Blessed be He, is located in a synagogue? It says: "God stands in the congregation of God..." (Psalms 82:1). And from where is it derived that ten people who pray, the Divine Presence is with them? "God stands in the congregation of God..." (*Berakhot* 6a)

When God attends communal prayer, our prayers can reach Him, and His presence can still be felt by His people.

At least during the day. But what about at night?[2] How can we feel the Divine Presence when the synagogues are closed and the streets are empty? The Talmud addresses this as well. At night prayer is replaced by Torah:

> And from where is it derived that when even one sits and engages in Torah study, the Divine Presence is with him? As it is says (Exodus 20:21) : "In every place where I cause My Name to be mentioned, I will come to you and bless you." (*Berakhot* 6a)

Torah study, even when isolated and alone, becomes a prayer service.[3] Just as God is present at the communal prayer service, so too he is with those who study Torah. Thus, God's plan to live amongst His people can still be attained, and those looking to speak will even now find an open channel.

---

[2] See Maharsha, *Tamid* 32b.

[3] The intertwining of Torah study and prayer is found throughout the works of our Sages. The *mishnah* in *Berakhot* (4:2) records that "Rabbi Nehunyah ben HaKanah would offer a brief prayer when he entered the study hall and when he left." The Talmud in *Mo'ed Katan* (29a) states, "Rabbi Levi said: One who leaves from the synagogue and goes to the study hall, and from the study hall to the synagogue, merits to receive the Divine Presence." Learning Torah even becomes part of our liturgy, as with the reading of Shema, the recitation of the sacrifices, the *Tosefta* of R' Yishmael's 13 principles of derivation, and the *mishnayot* of the second chapter of *Shabbat* on Friday night. For further examples, see R' Joseph B. Soloveitchik in *Shiurim l-zekher Abba Mori* volume 2.

The identification of Torah study with prayer is attested to by another Talmudic statement extolling the virtues of learning at night:

> Reish Lakish said: One who occupies himself with Torah at night, the Holy One, Blessed be He, spreads upon him a thread of grace during the day, as it says (Psalms 42:9), "By day, God will command His grace, and at night His song (*shirah*) shall be with me [as a prayer to God the guardian of my life]." What is the reason that by day, God will extend His grace? For at night His song (*shirah*, referring to Torah study) is with me. (*Avodah Zarah* 3b)

Reish Lakish, the great student and study partner of R' Yohanan, asserts that one who studies Torah at night is rewarded with grace and favor. His proof text, however, does not mention Torah study explicitly, but rather uses the word *shirah,* which in the context of the verse in Psalms refers to prayer. By identifying Torah learning with *shirah,* Reish Lakish is informing us that Torah study at night becomes prayer.

How does the learning of Torah constitute prayer? R' Joseph B. Soloveitchik (*Shiurim l-zekher Abba Mori* volume 2), based on the formulation of Maimonides in his *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot* (*Aseh* 5), categorizes both Torah study at night and prayer as "service of the heart." This concept consists of three elements which both prayer and Torah study share. Engaging in either prayer or Torah study: (1) demonstrates acceptance of the yoke of Heaven, (2) are modes of making requests of God,[4] (3) is a form of praise to God.[5] I would submit that the ultimate purpose of both prayer and Torah study is to connect with God and thus bring Him into our world. This is done in prayer by praising Him for all He has created, by sharing with Him our hopes and dreams, and by thanking Him for all He has done and continues to do for us. When learning Torah, we connect with God by studying the blueprint of the universe, and thus engage in an exploration of how our world should be. Studying the blueprint declares that we are not satisfied with the world as it is, but we desire that it fulfill God's original design. In this way, we implicitly ask for God to intervene and coordinate that transformation.

In the call of Jeremiah, the word *rinah*, understood as prayer, is parallel to the other parts

[4] R' Soloveitchik explains that God understands each individual's needs without the person stating them explicitly. Learning Torah constitutes a request in which one simply throws his burden on God. R' Jonathan Ziring ("The Midnight Song: Nocturnal Torah Study in Solitude," *Tradition* 52:1 (Winter 2020): 28) suggests that this is because engagement with Torah is a process of understanding God's will as expressed in our world. This is an acknowledgement that God knows what is best for everyone without being asked. The explanation I suggest in the text is similar, but with the emphasis on looking for the world repaired rather than a person's desires.

[5] R' Joseph B. Soloveitchik (*Shiurim l-zekher Abba Mori* volume 2) demonstrates that the true fulfillment of mourning is also done in the heart. In mourning as well we find acceptance of the yoke of Heaven via *tzidduk ha-din*, Justification of God's judgment, and praise to God via the recitation of *kaddish*.

of the verse, "pour out your heart... raise your hands…" in prayer. The prayer sought by Jeremiah is one of pleading with God for a rebuilt Temple and a reborn Israel - in other words, a return to how the world ought to be. Hence, the appropriateness of Torah study in answer to Jeremiah's exhortation.

Torah Study as Repentance[6]

Jeremiah calls on the people to mourn, to pray, to not peacefully accept the post-Temple world as the "new normal." However, to turn back the clock to a time when Jews could directly commune with God, to bring His presence back into our lives, requires one more element, *teshuvah* (repentance). Can we read repentance into Jeremiah's exhortation to awaken at night? In fact, the *Targum Yerushalmi* does just that in interpreting a later part of our verse, "Pour, like water, the crookedness of your heart and return in *teshuvah*." However, a hint of this can even be found in the first part the the verse, for the word *rinah* also may refer to *teshuvah*:

> R' Eliezer said: [the Jewish] redemption from Egypt was enabled by five catalysts: troubles, repentance, ancestral merit, mercy, and the arrival of the time to end the exile… So too, at the end of days [Jewish] redemption will be predicated on these five catalysts… "When He hears their call (*rinah*)" (Psalms 106:44), this refers to repentance (*teshuvah*). (*Yalkut Shimoni* on Torah 827)

If *rinah* refers to *teshuvah*, as *Yalkut Shimoni* suggests, then we can read Jeremiah's call at its outset as *teshuvah*-oriented: Arise! Call out, raise your voice in repentance at night!

Is repentance possible in a post-Temple world? King Solomon's address at the dedication of the Temple characterizes the Temple as the place for one to repent and receive forgiveness for their sins: "Should the heavens be shut and there be no rain, because they have sinned against You. Then they pray toward this place and acknowledge Your name and repent of their sins when You answer them. Hear in heaven and pardon the sin of Your servants, Your people Israel…" (Kings I 8:35-36). Without the Temple the road of the repentant is a long and arduous one:

> Amongst the ways of repentance are, for the penitent to continuously cry out with tears and supplications before God, to give charity according to his means, and to greatly distance himself from that with which he has sinned, to change his name, as if saying: "I am now another person, and not that person who performed those deeds," to completely change his conduct for the good and straight path, and to exile himself from his

[6] See also R' Daniel Z. Feldman, "The Teshuvah Beyond Teshuvah," *Rosh HaShana To-Go* (Tishrei 5769): 9.

> place of residence, for exile provides atonement for sins, because it leads him to submissiveness and to be humble and of low spirit. (*Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Teshuvah* 2:4)

With the destruction of the Temple, it is no longer possible to present oneself before the Almighty where He is found and simply repent. The call of Jeremiah recognizes this. To attain forgiveness one must spend sleepless nights calling out to God, pouring out one's heart like water and raising one's hands to Him in prayer.

Is there another way?

The Talmud (*Yoma* 86b) identifies two unequal pathways towards *teshuvah*: *teshuvah* out of fear, and *teshuvah* out of love. The first method transforms willful transgressions into unintentional sins, while the second transforms willful transgressions into merits. How can one attain *teshuvah* out of love?

> Rabbi Hama the son of Rabbi Hanina, also said: Why are tents juxtaposed to streams, as it is written, "As streams stretched forth, as gardens by the riverside; as aloes [*ahalim*] planted by God, as cedars by the water" (Numbers 24:6)? To tell you, just as streams elevate a person from ritual impurity to purity after he immerses himself in their water, so too tents [*ohalim*] of Torah elevate a person from the judgment of guilt to that of merit. (*Berakhot* 15b-16a)

Rabbi Hama the son of Rabbi Hanina identifies what action can be taken to transform judgments of guilt into that of merit: the study of Torah! This implies that one attains *teshuvah* out of love via the learning of Torah. Indeed, this claim rings true, since it is via Torah study that one can come to the love of God:

> The third *mitzvah* is that we are commanded to love God, exalted be He. This is to understand and closely examine His commandments, His statements, and His works, until we understand Him; and through this understanding to achieve a feeling of ecstasy. This is the goal of the commandment to love God. The language of *Sifrei* (Deuteronomy 33): For it says, "You shall love God your Lord" (Deuteronomy 6:5), how can I come to love God? It says, "and these words which I command you today shall be upon your heart," (Deuteronomy 6:6) that through this you will recognize the One Who spoke, and the world was. (Maimonides *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot, Aseh* 3).

By learning Torah one comes to love God, and

through the love of God one can achieve repentance - not just any repentance, but one that turns transgressions into merits.

This analysis leads us in a full circle back to R' Yohanan's interpretation of *rinah* as Torah study. From the time Jeremiah was a young man, his call to the people of Israel centered on one concept: *teshuvah*. This was so before the destruction of the Temple and certainly must be true afterwards. Yet, R' Yohanan is troubled. Is true repentance possible without a Temple? Can one possibly appear before God to beg for penitence when He is hidden? To this, R' Yohanan answers in the positive. True repentance is possible via the study of Torah.

The Torah of Exile

> At midnight I arise to praise You for Your just rules. (Psalms 119:62)
>
> Rabbi Levi said: "The harp was suspended over the bed of David and when it was midnight, the northern wind would blow and the harp would play by itself… When David heard its sound he would arise and study Torah. When Israel heard the music, they would say, "If King David is engaged in Torah study, then we should be all the more so!" Immediately they studied the Torah. (*Lamentations Rabbah* 2:22)

Must the nighttime engagement in Torah be one of praying and repentance? Must *rinah* always be twisted to refer to mourning and not rejoicing?

The above *midrash*, commenting on the very verse of Jeremiah's call, informs us that Jeremiah was not the first to wake people in the midst of the night to engage in the study of Torah. King David did likewise, but in a different historical, sociological, and religious context. Jeremiah called out bitterly, to shock people from their complacency after the Temple's destruction. King David gently brought people out of their restful slumber. Jeremiah's anguished cries were for Torah study as mourning, prayer, and repentance. King David's melodious harp encouraged the Torah study of paeans and praise of God. Jeremiah cried over Jews in exile, King David rejoiced over the Jewish golden era.

> Alternatively, Reish Lakish said: One who occupies himself with Torah in this world, which is comparable to night, the Holy One, Blessed be He, extends a thread of kindness over him in the World-to-Come, which is comparable to day, as it says, "By day, the Lord will command His kindness, and in the night His song shall be with me." (*Avodah Zarah* 3b)

In exile, the nighttime Torah vigil is one of mourning. In the era of redemption, the era of the World-to-Come, this Torah will become one of

song and rejoicing.

Rejoicing in Exile

Can one find joy in the study of Torah even at times of darkness, even in the bitterness of exile?

Perhaps R' Yohanan's identification of *rinah* with the learning of Torah is meant precisely to accomplish this transformation. There is no doubt that Jeremiah's call into the darkness of night was to arouse the people to mourning, prayer, and repentance. What else could it be at a time when God has appeared to abandon His people and allowed his abode to be destroyed? Yet, Jeremiah invokes a word that usually means sing and rejoice. Why? To this R' Yohanan replies, because there is a way to transform the suffering and pain into song and rejoicing, by learning Torah.

Jeremiah calls on the people to mourn the loss of the Temple, Torah, and the ruin of God's plan as to how the world should be. Torah is the blueprint of that plan and learning Torah provides us a substitute to the ideal of Temple service.[7]

Jeremiah calls on the people to pray. Yet, after the destruction of the Temple, there is a wall of iron between God and the Jewish Nation. Studying Torah brings God's presence down to the Jewish people, thus circumventing the wall.

Jeremiah calls on the people to repent for their sins. Yet, after the destruction of the Temple, there is no place to go to seek God's forgiveness. Torah study is a method of turning transgressions into merit.

The nighttime study of Torah can be one of rejoicing even at a time of exile. The divine glory dwells before us even in darkness. Jeremiah provided us the key to this understanding by using the word *rinah*, song. For though we have lost the Temple and have been banished from our land, we still sing the joyful song of Torah before God.

[7] Avraham said before God: Master of the Universe... when the Temple is not standing, what will become of [the Jewish Nation]? God said to him: I have already enacted for them the order of offerings. When they read them before Me, I will ascribe them credit as though they had sacrificed them before Me and I will pardon them for all their transgressions. (*Ta'anit* 27b)