

# Forgiveness

*G'mar Hatima Tova.* You may have noticed that we have new *Yizkor* Books, donated by Barbara and Dennis Smiler in memory of Dennis' parents. We are using them for every Yizkor. Each one has on it a sticker saying "Property of the Jericho Jewish Center." Please keep them in the Jericho Jewish Center. The Book of Life, on the other hand, is yours to take.

Please bring in food to the Manhattan Drive entrance for Project Replenish for the Mid Island Y Food Bank, as well as shampoo, conditioner, soap and cleaning supplies for the STEM Preschool Project Replenish, also going to the Mid Island Y Food Bank.

Please see the two sheets printed on resume paper about Mitzvah 613, donation opportunities for our new Torah, and our Torah Kickoff next month. Please also go to your bank to get \$20 worth of rolled pennies and bring them to the office so the Religious School can get closer to reaching 304,805 pennies.

*Forgiveness-can you imagine?*

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When I came to the Jericho Jewish Center, Cantors Goldstein and Black sang the song *zog shel kumen im geluah*, about the coming of the Messiah. I think it's become clear (if it wasn't already) that I'm not the Messiah-I'm just a person doing his best and striving to grow each and every day. As such, though I have tried very hard not to make any mistakes, I am certain that I have made many. I would like to take this opportunity on the holiest day of the year to ask for forgiveness. As "Our Rabbis taught: The obligation of confession of sins comes on the eve of the Day of Atonement, as it grows dark."<sup>2</sup>

For the traditionalists who were angered by my making ultimatums as the rabbi (such as saying that no one could say the blessing "praised are you G-d for not making me a woman,") please forgive me. I continue to find those words repugnant and choose not to say them but respect the right of those who wish to say them.

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<sup>1</sup> Company in *Hamilton* "It's Quiet Uptown," Book and Lyrics by Lin Manuel-Miranda.

<sup>2</sup> Babylonian Talmud Yoma 87a

For the progressives who felt I did not go far enough in (for example) putting up a rainbow flag outside of the Jericho Jewish Center, please forgive me. I still feel with every fiber of my being that we need to be radically welcoming to LGBT and interfaith families and am on the liberal end of our movement in this regard, yet I strongly believe that the only flags that should be put up outside a synagogue (if any) are of the United States and of Israel.

For the politically active who were upset that I didn't talk enough about the political issues of the day, please forgive me. I continue to assert that the place for politics and the pulpit is as part of a discussion rather than a sermon, not because I am afraid of alienating others but so that people of differing political views can respond to one another and to me rather than my using a "bully pulpit."

For the Zionists who felt Israel was not enough of a part of our conversation, please forgive me. I feel a strong connection to Israel and wish I could be part of the Congregational Trip to Israel this November- but at least I have a good reason for not going with the anticipated

arrival of a little one ☺. I have not discussed Israel from the pulpit as much as some would like not because I fear offending others but because I do not want to sound like a political pundit, who are far better trained in that field than I am. I have left my discussions to Israel for either historic events, such as the opening of the US Embassy in Jerusalem, or to sharing Israel's technological innovations during my Israel Update before the Prayer for Israel at Shabbat services.

Lastly and most importantly, for those who feel I was not there for them during a time of need, please forgive me. I have tried to be responsive to everyone but I am certain that I unintentionally neglected people during times when they were counting on me. As I'm sure has become clear to you by now, I'm a human being, not the Messiah, and human beings make mistakes. The first President of our country said, "Though, in reviewing the incidents of my administration, I am unconscious of intentional error, I am nevertheless too sensible of my defects not to think it probable that I may have committed many

errors,”<sup>3</sup> and if the founder of our country can say it and genuinely mean it, all the more so can I.

Such a public confession does not absolve going to people directly and asking for forgiveness, and I have tried to do so, just as I hope each of you has tried to do so since the beginning of Elul. The public confessionals that we recite on Yom Kippur, the Ashamnus and Al Chets, only absolve sins that we have done towards G-d, not towards our fellow men. The question is how to respond to someone asking you for forgiveness. The right thing is to accept it and move on, but often that is easier said than done. Unfortunately, when we hold onto anger, or hold a grudge, we most often hurt ourselves and make no impact on the other. On the other hand, when we let go of the pain, as difficult as that may be, we release ourselves from suffering further.

Furthermore, it is challenging not to forgive others but to expect that we will be forgiven. Such words come from the prophet Ben Sira, absent in our Bible but actively quotes by rabbis in the Talmud:

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<sup>3</sup> President George Washington's Farewell Address

*“Forgive your neighbor his wrongdoing; then, when you pray, your sins will be forgiven. If a man harbors a grudge against another, is he to expect healing from the Lord? If he has no mercy on his fellow-man is he still to ask forgiveness for his own sins? If a mere mortal cherishes rage, where is he to look for pardon? Think of the end that awaits you, and be done with hate; think of mortality and death, and be true to the commandments; think of the commandments, and do not be enraged at your neighbor; think of the Covenant of the Most High, and overlook faults.”<sup>4</sup>*

This does not mean that one should forgive or “turn the other cheek” at any cost. Rabbi Rachel Barenblat in “The Velveteen Rabbi” writes *“If someone has harmed you -- whether in body, heart, mind, or spirit -- and they come to you seeking forgiveness, you're allowed to take the time you need to discern 1) whether their apology is genuine, and 2) whether they have done all that they could to remedy the damage, and 3) whether they have done the internal work of becoming a person who would no longer harm you in that same way given the opportunity to do*

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<sup>4</sup> Ben Sira 28:2-7

*so again. If the answer to any of those questions is no -- and kal v'chomer (all the more so) if they don't apologize in the first place -- then you are not obligated to forgive them for harming you.*"<sup>5</sup> If, however, one is genuinely sorry and (more importantly) **demonstrates changed behavior**, then forgiveness is in order.

On this holiest day of the year, may we try to be like The Merciful One, the one who prays not that sinners cease from this world but rather sins. May we strive to forgive past wrongdoings of others, transitioning from feeling like victims to becoming the authors of our own lives. May we work on controlling how we react to bad news, ill treatment or difficult situations, acting assertively and appropriately, with confidence and thoughtful reactions, as well as proactively whenever possible. Let us we accept one another's flaws as well as our own and let us seek to forgive others as well as to be forgiven for past wrongdoings. Most importantly, let us recognize **היום**, the moment in which we currently find ourselves, and let us make the most out of it, being emissaries for

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<sup>5</sup> Rabbi Rachel Barenblat, "When Not to Forgive," in blog "Velveteen Rabbi," September 17, 2018. <http://velveteenrabbi.blogs.com/blog/2018/09/when-not-to-forgive.html>

good and striving to make ourselves and the world in which we live a better place. *Ken Yhi Ratzon*, may it be our will to do so.

We continue with the start of *Selichot*, the prayer for forgiveness, turning to the reverse acrostic *Yaaleh* on Page 227. Please rise as the ark is opened.