

Prayer in a Time of Hate

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Table of Contents

Royalty & Rosh Hashana	2
Pathways to Blessing	3
We Deserve Blessing	4
We Need Blessing	6
We Will Use Blessing Well	8
Blessing G-d	10
Giving Thanks	11
Blessing the People	12
Torah Readings	12
Shofar	15
Musaf	16
Contributors	17
Appendices	18



Introduction

As we stand at the brink of a new year, we can see a rising tsunami of global antisemitism oddly juxtaposed with the incredible military successes Israel has seen after October 7th and the moral challenges created by Hamas in the Gaza conflict.

Any Jewish observer could wonder what awaits us in the year ahead. Does the global push for 'from the River to the Sea' achieve real traction? Will we see the elimination of the State of Israel combined with increasing violence against Jews from Austria to Australia?

Or, perhaps, the year will be a year of blessing, with Hamas removed, hostages rescued, a pushback against antisemitism and peace finally

established with all our Arab neighbors?

We might imagine that we direct these outcomes. In reality, while we can plan and prepare, the future cannot be predicted or controlled. It is into this space that prayer emerges. Prayer is not a substitute for action; prayer is simply a request for opportunity. No matter how much we might pray, it remains up to us to use our opportunities well and to be moral and just in our actions.

To benefit from this guide, you do not have to be affiliated with particular branch of Judaism or politics. This guide is not meant to displace your previous understandings or beliefs. It is meant only to supplement our national prayers - building on what you already believe.

Royalty & Rosh Hashana

The whole week, our entire town was buzzing with a strange electricity. Storefronts and streets had been cleaned, the whole town seemed rejuvenated. And everywhere you turned you heard the same excited expression, "The Queen is coming!"

On the day of her arrival, we all dressed in our very best clothes. The town came to a stop as bakers, insurance agents, house cleaners and businessmen gathered lined our central street, in anticipation. A rush shot through the crowd when the police bikes first arrived. They were followed by the most beautiful car I'd ever seen – a black convertible limousine with shimmering paint.

The Queen was sitting in the back. She was smiling, as if she had never seen anything as wonderful as our town. We smiled back, brimming with pride.

Then my leaned down to me and asked, "Why do people care about the Queen?" The question was shocking. I thought about it for years. But now, I finally understand. It wasn't the car that excited us. It wasn't even the person of the Queen herself.

No, the Queen mattered because of what she stood for. That is the true mark of royalty.

A central theme of the Rosh Hashana prayers is G-d's Kingship. G-d's does not have any jewels or fancy cars that herald His arrival. G-d is incorporeal, so there is no person to admire and raise up. No, our King represents the concept of Kingship at its very core. Our King is represented only by His values.

In the aftermath of the Sin of the Calf, G-d passes before Moshe (Moses), revealing His back. His back is described as *to*, a word used to assess creations which themselves play a role in creation. G-d's back is the past.

Then G-d reveals His Thirteen Attributes. They

speak of thousands of generations. However, even today thousands of generations have not passed since that of the first divinely inspired man (Adam). These attributes describe G-d's future. His face. They tell of eternity, of grace, of truth, of the repayment and preservation of kindness, of the lifting of spiritual burdens and of the limiting of impacts of destruction and evil (see the appendix).

G-d's back is the legacy of His creation. G-d's front is His values - grace, truth, kindness and the limits of destruction.

When G-d travels before us on Rosh Hashana, that is the King we honor and those are the values we celebrate.

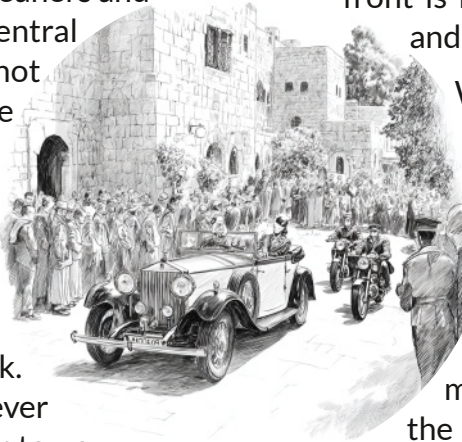
But we are not the townspeople lining the street. We are meant for something more. We are meant to be the car, the jewels and the palace. We are meant to be the regalia that tell the world of the Majesty of G-d. And so we are meant to pursue G-d's values, and leave a legacy of creation.

Of course, all too often, we are as tattered and undeserving as a filthy and rundown car. It is as if the Queen were to be heralded by poorly dressed men on bicycles while driving a broken-down car. Our reality distances us from G-d and His blessings.

G-d preserves us because of the promises to our forebearers. But survival is not enough. He molds us and shapes us – with all the difficulties and pain that involves – so we can finally be His treasure.

On Yom Kippur, we read, "Like silver in the hand of the refiner if he wills, he adulterates it, if he wills, he keeps it pure; so too are we in Your hand."

G-d is our craftsman, and we are being fashioned to represent His majesty. On Rosh Hashana, we can shape ourselves. We can become a part of the divine procession, and we can unlock two thousand generations of kindness.



Paths to Blessing

A True Story

My mother lay in the hospital bed. There weren't a bunch of beeping machines or desperate nurses. It was a cancer ward, and she was on a heavy dose of chemotherapy – a dose that was not expected to save her life.

My mother was a Professor at a local college. After most semesters, she'd email me her Excel grading sheet. I'd get the formulas cleaned up and then we'd go online to finalize every student's grade. My mother was old school. She insisted on grading students based on their performance. If a student failed, they failed.

There were a few exceptions, though. If students really pushed themselves and overachieved at the end of a semester, she'd mark them up. That was not the only exception. I remember her telling me about a student who needed a certain grade to preserve his scholarship. A five-point improvement in her course was the difference between him finishing college or dropping out. He was trying. He was close. She gave him those five points.

As my mother lay in that hospital bed, another semester had just wrapped up. She had already submitted her students' grades. But as she lay there, she had me mark every student up a full grade. From B to A and from 80 to 90. I didn't ask her why she did it, but she told me nonetheless. She said, "They need the kindness."

That kindness was her final professional act.

In a way, in her little sphere of influence, my mother was like G-d. She was influencing her students' fates, and impacting those who would rely on those grades. And, throughout, she had a

logic. A good grade, a blessing, could be achieved through one of three paths.

You could receive a good grade because you deserved it, you needed it or you demonstrated you came to realize its value and demonstrated that you would use it well.

The Rosh Hashana prayers are built around these same three concepts of Blessing. We G-d to be blessed because:

- 1) We earned it
- 2) We need it to survive
- 3) We recognize the presence of G-d in our lives and will use our blessings well.

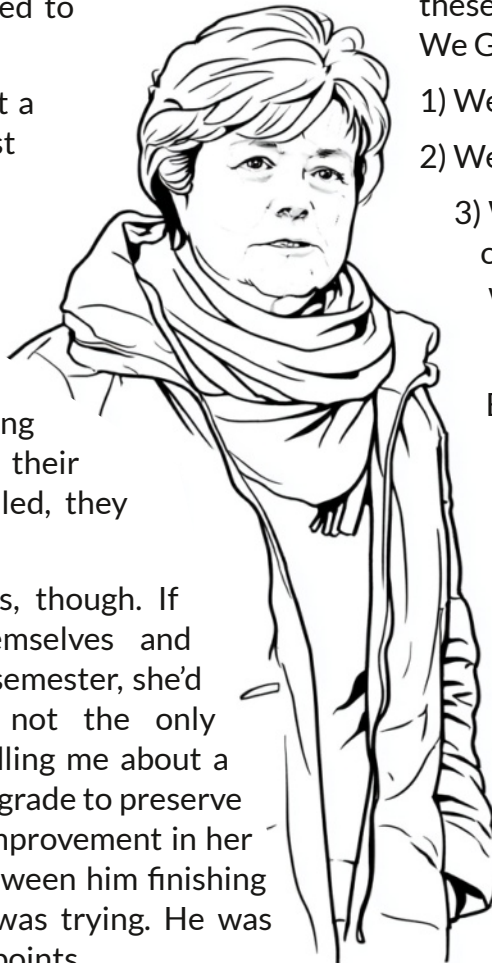
But it doesn't stop there.

My mother's final professional act was an act of undeserved kindness. That is the legacy she wanted to leave, and it was an expression of her love for her students. She did love her students, just as G-d loves us. Sometimes, just as with grades, the path of kindness is not so obvious but the desire for kindness remains.

This Rosh Hashana, as we face a unique and powerful combination of both opportunities and threats. We are being graded as a nation. But G-d wants to bless us. He is ready to hear us. We just have to make an argument. We have to make an appeal.

We need to argue that:

- 1) We earned it
- 2) We need it to survive
- 3) We recognize the presence of G-d in our lives and will use our blessings well.



We Deserve It

Rabbi Shalom Schwartz

Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaCohen Kook, the first Chief Rabbi of pre-state Israel, taught that the diverse, and often opposing elements within the Jewish people are not flaws to be eliminated, but essential threads in the tapestry of our collective identity and mission. Every perspective, every cultural reference point, and every temperament carries a spark of truth that, when given expression, reflects the brilliant light of our calling as Am Yisrael.

On the threshold of a new year, almost two years since October 7th – that horrific day of tragic awakening—Rav Kook's soaring vision feels particularly relevant. Israel today is a vibrant, multi-dimensional society—home to an astonishing variety of ideologies, viewpoints, and ethnicities. Within our borders live Jews whose families arrived from a hundred countries, as well as Druze, Christian, and Moslem Arabs, who share in the life and future of this land. We argue loudly, we disagree passionately, yet somehow, in the moments that matter most, we come together.

And this, perhaps more than anything, is why the people of Israel deserve blessing in the year ahead.

The Strength in Our Differences

Walk through a café in Tel Aviv, a shuk in Jerusalem, or a park in Be'er Sheva and you will overhear conversations from every corner of the Jewish world. Secular, religious, left, right; all are here, and all care deeply about

Israel's future, even if they differ on the contours of the destination and the path to get there.

Our secular and left-leaning brothers and sisters often carry a vision centered on universal ethics, global relationships, innovation, and openness to the world. They are animated by the idea that Israel should be a beacon of moral responsibility to all humanity.

Our religious and right-leaning brothers and sisters often prioritize the covenantal mission of our people, rooted in Torah, history, and the imperative to strengthen our national identity without being overly enamored or swayed by world opinion.

Though divergent and pulsing with tension, these perspectives correspond to the two essential dimensions of Am Yisrael: the universal calling to bring light to all nations, and the particular focus on preserving the unique covenantal identity of the Jewish people. This isn't an either/or proposition. It's a duet, not a duel. Each is necessary for our full beauty to emerge, and only when harmonized do they unlock the stunning depth of who we are meant to be.

Family as the Glue

Yet the splendor of cohesiveness often remains just beyond our reach. And so we wonder, what can allow opposing viewpoints to coexist without tearing the nation apart?

I believe the answer lies in one word: Family.

In Israel, family ties run deep and transcend just the nuclear household. Extended families gather for Shabbat and holidays while soldiers form sibling-like bonds. Though political disagreements flare, the bonds of shared life, danger, and destiny tie us together.



It is no coincidence that our national story began with the families of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, and Jacob, Leah, and Rachel. We matured into diverse family centered tribes called to thrive together not by blurring distinctions, but by being open to learning from each other's character and strengths. At Mount Sinai, the Torah describes the Jewish People as standing united "as one person with one heart". Loyalty, shared destiny and values of a cohesive family unit provide the foundation of our national mission.

The Fusion of Body and Soul

Reborn Israel's story is one of remarkable productivity, resilience, and inventiveness. We are a global leader in technology, medicine, agriculture, security, and water innovation. "Start-up Nation" is not just a slogan; it is a lived reality that benefits people far beyond our borders.

Israel is also a spiritual powerhouse. Torah learning flourishes at a scale unseen for two millennia. Ethical debates and the age-old wrestling with the meaning of justice and holiness are daily conversations in this land. More than a country, Israel is one enormous, pulsing, resonant beit medrash-study hall of the nation.

The physical and the spiritual – the "body" and the "soul" of the nation—are not separate. In this timeless land of promise, dreams, and prayer, the corporeal and the heavenly have begun to fuse within our national identity. Today, in the midst of our unfolding geula-redemption, this process can be maddening, while more often it is spectacular and breathtaking.

When the Iron Dome intercepts a rocket, that is technological brilliance, and an act manifesting a supreme Jewish value; the inherent sanctity of every life. When we develop drought-resistant wheat strains, this is simultaneously innovation and the fulfillment of prophecy: The land will again yield her bounty to children that returned home. When soldiers defend our people, land, and

values, a synergy is unleashed that inspires and elevates us all.

The integration of spirit and innovation unfolding in Israel is more than a national story; it is a beacon that signals to the world that humanity's future can be guided not only by power and progress, but by purpose and holiness.

Every Segment's Contribution

Rav Kook saw the Jewish people as a prism. White light enters, and through the prism emerges a spectrum of colors. Each is necessary for the light to be complete.

So too with the many and diverse segments of our society. Each one brings something unique and priceless.

The secular and left leaning ensure the spirit of freedom of choice is alive and well. The right leaning and religious sectors provide an anchor and moral compass for society. The large traditional center provides a bridge of respect for the past and openness to change.

Rav Kook captured the essence of this era: "To Renew the Old and Sanctify the New."

Our differences are not a problem to be solved but an inherent asset to be embraced and nurtured.

Why We Deserve It

These past two years have sorely tested us. War, loss, and rising global hatred. And yet, amid the trials, we are witness to a deeply profound expression of unity, generosity, kindness, and familial love. Since that dreaded day, countless people in endless ways mobilize and volunteer to support displaced families, assist wives of soldiers serving for hundreds of days, help farmers whose work force vanished overnight, and so much more. Every day, tens of thousands drop everything to fulfill their reserve military duty. Behind them a family-nation donates time, resources, and blood. We may be

the Start-Up nation, but in our heart and soul — in our bones — we are the Show-Up Nation. To live in Israel in this moment is to live in awe, and to be humbled in the face of our collective beauty, our Tiferet-Radiance.

We are a people who argue about almost everything. And yet, in a moment's notice, show up for one another without hesitation. That combination of passion and loyalty, of debate and devotion, is rare in our world, perhaps even unique. It is the sign of a living, breathing nation that after all we have been through, over two thousand years, and these last two years, still cares deeply about its mission.

For all of this — for our resilience, our creativity, our moral striving, and our unshakable bonds — the People of Israel deserve blessing in the year ahead.

We deserve a blessing because we are a blessing.

A Rosh HaShanah Prayer

As the shofar sounds, I pray the diverse holy threads of our people continue to weave themselves into a masterpiece of human and Divine spirit. I pray our arguments will be for the sake of Heaven, and that our children and grandchildren inherit not only a strong Israel but a harmonious one: an Israel that embodies both the universal and the particular, the body and the soul; an Israel whose inner light radiates to every corner of the world, to which we have finally returned.

May this be the year when we truly become the model of brotherhood Rav Kook envisioned — a single flame that ignites countless others, a light not only to ourselves, but to all humanity.

And may we all be inscribed in the Book of Life for a year of healing, peace, truth, love, and joy.

We Need It Hillel Fuld

Jewish history is not normal. We shouldn't exist. By every rule of history, by every measure of logic, we should've disappeared centuries ago.

And yet, here we are.

That's not a chance. That's not a strategy. That's not resilience alone. That's a miracle.

Open the Torah and you'll see the pattern right away. G-d saves those He promises to save. Noach and the animals in the flood. Yishmael when he's abandoned in the desert. The Jewish people walked out of Egypt, the most powerful empire of its time.

That same promise - that same miracle - is the only reason you and I are still here today.

But if Jewish history teaches us anything, it's this:

survival is never automatic.

What Jew hatred looks like today

Look around the world right now. Jew hatred is on the rise.

Stores smashed. Synagogues burned. Jews beaten for walking down the street with a kippah.

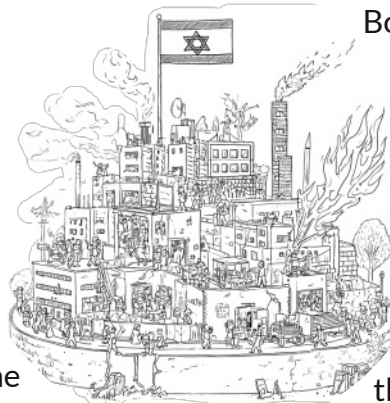
Boycotts. Cancel culture dressed up as activism.

Jews painted, once again, as the root of all evil.

It's ugly. It's painful. But let's be honest: it's not existential. Not yet.

The State of Israel still trades with the world. Jews are still free to study, to work, to live in much of the Diaspora.

But here's the thing: it doesn't take much imagination to see how this could escalate - and fast.



Imagine

Imagine boycott movements actually succeeding - cutting Israel off from Europe and America.

Imagine “look the other way” on sporadic violence becoming “look the other way” on mass violence.

For centuries, Jews were restricted from many jobs in both the European and the Arab worlds. With the rise of Napoleon, restrictions largely faded in Europe. At the same time, though, pogroms and antisemitism became far more frequent in the Arab world.

In the 1930s there was a massive uptick in Jewish restrictions in both Europe and the Arab world. In Nazi Germany, those restrictions were the first step on the road to genocide. In the Muslim world, they were the prelude to the greatest geographic ethnic cleansing in human history, with 99.8% of Jews expelled from Algeria to Afghanistan.

Were these sorts of restrictions to rise again, even under the guise of antizionism? Imagine universities, schools, whole professions adopting antisemitic ideologies and quietly pushing Jews out? In that scenario, Diaspora Jews could become poor, marginalized, and silenced once again.

Maybe many would flee to Israel. But what if Israel itself was suddenly poor and isolated? What if it had to face overwhelming violence on multiple fronts at the exact same time?

This isn't a doomsday fantasy. Just last year, Turkey's President Erdogan stood at a rally. His supporters chanted, “Mr. President, take us to Jerusalem.” His answer? “Patience brings victory.”

And let's not fool ourselves - if Iran decides to ignite a wider conflict, or if Turkey pushes harder, Israel could suddenly find itself fighting wars it cannot afford to fight alone.

This is how existential threats begin. Step by step. Door by door. Until it's too late.

Can We Survive Another Catastrophe?

Here's the painful question: Could the Jewish people endure another catastrophic scenario so soon after the Shoah?

Could we survive another round of exile, boycott, poverty, and war? Or would our small remaining communities simply melt away into history?

By logic, by numbers, by geopolitics, the answer should be no.

And yet... here we are.

Because every single time we've been pushed to the brink, something unexplainable has happened.

Miracles Then, Miracles Now

This isn't just ancient history. Yes, Isaiah tells us 185,000 Assyrian soldiers were wiped out overnight outside Jerusalem by one angel. Yes, Jehoshaphat prayed and watched his enemies destroy themselves.

But look at our modern history. It's the same story.

1948: five armies against one tiny new state, barely armed. By all accounts, Israel should've been gone in days. And yet bullets missed point blank, and enemies retreated after claiming they saw “legions in white.”

1967: in six days, Israel destroyed entire air forces and armies that outnumbered it twenty to one. Why? Because Egypt “mysteriously” shut off its radar for exactly two hours - the two hours Israel needed.

1973: tanks outnumbered twelve to one in the Golan Heights. Still, the Syrians stopped advancing - convinced they were walking into a trap that didn't exist.

1991: thirty-nine Scud missiles from Iraq hit Israel. Buildings flattened. Entire neighborhoods shaken. Not a single direct fatality. Not one.

Even in our own time, rockets have been blown off course by sudden gusts of wind. Entire hospitals have been evacuated hours before direct hits. Thousands of rockets have been defective. Hundreds of missiles have been intercepted at odds no military strategist can explain. In October 2024, 2,500 private homes were damaged by Iranian missiles. There were no Israeli fatalities, or even serious injuries.

Is that luck? Technology? Coincidence? Call it what you want. I call it what it is: miracles.

Why We Pray

So, when we pray, we're not asking for something new. We're asking G-d to keep doing what He's been doing all along.

Protecting His people in ways no general, no politician, no journalist can explain.

When we say, "Inscribe us in the Book of Life," it's not just personal. It's national. It's survival. It's saying: "Hashem, You've carried us through Egypt, Babylon, Rome, Spain, Germany, and beyond. Please - carry us through what comes next."

The threats are real. The hatred is rising. The danger of isolation is not abstract. Turkey, Iran, boycotts, exile - these aren't theories. They're possibilities.

And that's exactly why our prayers matter. Because our entire history is proof that when we pray, G-d fights for us. Sometimes with angels. Sometimes with radar malfunctions. Sometimes with a gust of wind.

The Covenant is Alive

The fact that you and I are here today, still calling ourselves Jews, still reading the same Torah, still praying to the same G-d in the same Land - that's the greatest miracle of all.

No empire has managed to erase us. Not one. And yet, if you look at Jewish survival only through the lens of politics or strategy, you'll miss the truth: our story is not normal. It's miraculous.

So yes, antisemitism is growing. Yes, isolation is possible. Yes, another existential threat is always one step away.

But if history has taught us anything, it's this: we're not alone. We never have been.

Let's pray like everything depends on G-d. Because it does.

And let's live with the awareness that every day we're here is itself a miracle.

We Will Use it Well

**Dr. Nir Boms &
Dr. Agi Boms**

These are challenging times for our people. There are clouds of thunder and war within, and close to, our land. Lightning still strikes from above, sent by those in far-away lands. Even now, there are those of our people still trapped underground who can hardly imagine a light at the end of a tunnel. Painfully familiar clouds of hate surround us; forming yet another front in our embattled lives.

Our prayers ask for freedom, not only for our hostages but also for our minds, which are trapped in this difficult circle of endless struggle.

But what should we pray for? What is the freedom that we seek, we the people who gave the world the most profound journey from slavery to freedom. And do we seek only the freedom of our own stranded people, or may we dare to cast a far broader net in our aspirations and our prayers.

Ascending to a world above - one of the strongest aspirations of our tradition - we can think for a moment about the tranquility of the Garden of

Eden. The Garden was a place of innocence, of simplicity. It was a metaphor for a world that should exist within a realm of spirit, divorced from some of the battles of humanity that exists outside of Eden. The Tree of Knowledge gave Adam some tools that will later develop into ethics and morals and provide a compass for good and evil. That process will later serve not only Judaism, but humanity at large as if began to develop its moral foundation code with the hope of establishing a path for the good.

The Zohar reminds us that Eden suggested another path that existed, for a brief moment, before the human interaction with the tree of knowledge. The primordial reality of Eden, filled with love, security, faith and innocence still serve as a path for our dreams and our world to come.

But how can we see this vision when we are surrounded by darkness?

When G-d separated light from darkness, the night received its place on earth. Jews have experienced darkness from time immemorial. Slavery, persecution, violence, murder, and, finally, industrialized extermination on a scale never seen by man - before or since. However, describing his own story of survival, Elie Weisel choose to call it "night" which, unlike darkness, is not divorced of light.

As we face our own troubles, the testimonies of Holocaust survivors can serve as the greatest example of prayer and hope in times of darkness.

Jews in the extermination camps experienced hatred in its most brutal form. Halina Birenbaum, a 12-year-old girl who lost her family and the world she knew in Auschwitz, never doubted that she must survive—for herself, for her family, and also for the sake of her story she must share. She

titled her first book "Hope is the Last to Die," and as she later explained, she never stopped asking Hashem for Hope, even on the cold winter nights in Auschwitz.

For thousands of years, measured in blood, the Jewish soul has not disappeared or even weakened. In the darkest chapter of Jewish history in Europe, many Jews of Auschwitz maintained their dignity, risking their lives to offer prayers to Hashem.

The question naturally arises: How did Jews manage to survive for so many years without their own state, army, or shelter?

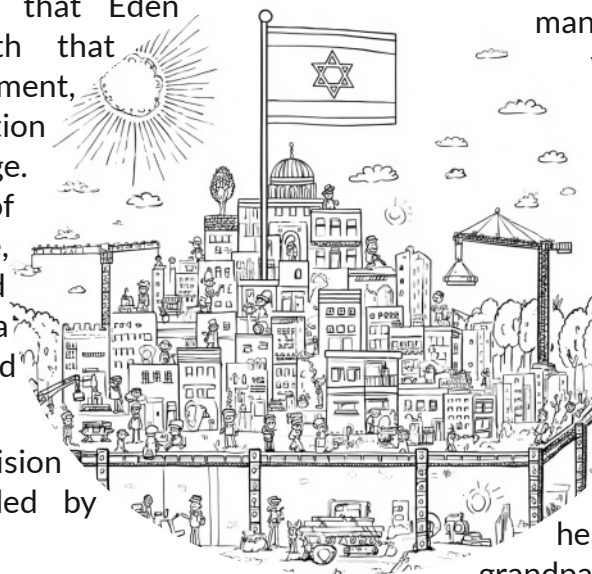
The answer is that they were united by Hope. They did not lack strength, even though their struggle never ended.

Many people might say that as Jews, we know much more about hatred than others. We learn about it, we hear about it from our grandparents and parents, and today we must face it ourselves. As Jews, we know much more about darkness than other people.

But our experience of darkness has also given us a unique spiritual connection. Even as we struggle with the right path forward, it has given us a unique solidarity. But most of all, our survival in the face of struggle has given us a unique sense of Hope.

In these times, maybe we need to change our perspective about darkness. Many of us know that hospital walls have heard the sincerest prayers to G-d. We pray for salvation, health, and sometimes a miracle for our loved ones. But isn't every day with them a miracle?

Prayer in times of darkness is a conversation with G-d, a time to build spiritual bonds, a reminder of who we are and why we are here. It is a lesson we



must hold in our hearts in times of peace.

Hope that comes from prayer is one good Jewish answer to hatred. Of course, hatred needs to be tackled and at times, we must fight and not just offer prayer. But Hope is an answer of its own, ingrained in Jewish DNA and history. No other nation in the world sings of Hope in its national anthem. Many anthems chant a call for arms or tell a story of bravery and sacrifice. We sing of a patient dream fulfilled.

In the time of 9th of Av, we mourn our destruction of our Temple not by a plea to take revenge against Greeks or Romans but rather with an introspection about our own actions. We seek a way in which we can improve the House that is yet to be built.

In times of pain, the Jewish nation unites - not around the themes of hatred and revenge - but around the concept of Hope.

This is why, despite our many shortcomings, we should be blessed in this time of trouble. We are a

people of Hope, and we can share our Hope with the world.

At the beginning of this piece we asked what we should pray for.

Teshuva, repentance, is the process of realizing you are in the presence of G-d and changing your way because of it. This is not simply a matter of regret over mistakes made, it is also a matter of opportunity. In the presence of G-d, we have opportunity. We have Hope.

For thousands of years, we have embraced that Hope. Hope only possible because we know we are in the presence of Hashem.

If our hopes for freedom and security in our own land, are finally realized then we, the Jewish people, will serve as a beacon of divinely granted opportunity and a symbol of the power of enduring Hope.

Blessing G-d

Emily Gold was very pleased with what she'd accomplished. She'd moved from a small town to the big city. She'd become a lawyer and climbed her way through the ranks until she'd made partner. She was wealthy and successful by almost any measure.

A lot of her drive had come from her father. He was a farmer, back in that small town. He worked hard. His real passion was woodworking. He made the most intricate little sculptures; not of people or animals, but somehow of ideas.

What he did hardly translated to the big city. Whittled wood wasn't fashionable or sleek or cultured. Not that her father cared. He was satisfied and at peace.

That was the problem. It was his birthday, and

Emily couldn't think of what to get him. But there was nothing he needed. There was nothing that would make him more complete.

Then she realized what she could do.

She called her father and asked him to ship her a few of his sculptures. She put a couple in her apartment and a couple in her office. She even put one in her car. They weren't fashionable or sleek, but they were beautiful. She was surprised to discover that they reminded her of a Truth, and of a Peace, that she had long forgotten.

By making her father's gifts a part of her life, both of them were blessed.

Our prayers are filled with the blessings of G-d. But how can we bless the one who lacks nothing? The answer is in Emily's story: by making G-d a part of us, we can create opportunities for G-dliness in our world. And both the nation of Israel and our G-d can be blessed.

Giving Thanks

The Modim Prayer is often explained as a thanksgiving prayer. It is, in its way, the most important prayer. All too often, we forget to be thankful.

But what should we be thankful for?

Although it is often translated as a thanksgiving, the prayer actually starts with a sense of dependency. We need G-d in order to survive from generation to generation. Without that knowledge of a greater arc - of which we are a part - we would not be able to carry on.

But that isn't thanksgiving. No, the second part is about thanksgiving. We thank G-d for molding our lives, for giving our souls a chance to be

relevant, for our trials and our tribulations and for the miracle that our people - and our worship - have been sustained.

This is the greatest kind of thanks. It is not a thanksgiving for a nice car or even a good family. It is a thanksgiving for a life of meaning.

We are only 0.2% of the global population. The world may hate us, but whether we like it or not, we matter.

So thank you G-d for giving us an unusual opportunity to be relevant. Thank for the trials and tribulations that shape us. And thank you for the miracles that sustain us.

Blessing the People

Baruch Yakobi always had hope. At least until he visited Garubia. There, he saw a terrible reality. Well-meaning people gave loans or grants to the government of Garubia or funneled them through local managers who seemed to specialize in stealing aid. The result of the kindness intended for the people Garubia was a vast web of corruption that gave power to the very worst people Garubia had to offer.

Baruch Yakobi had another vision. He wanted to make loans directly to people, but not loans with interest rates that would crush them. In his vision, if a woman wanted to start a small business, she might borrow whatever 10 days of labor in Garubia was worth in order. She would then need to pay back those 10 days, spaced over the next 5 years. 2 days of the first year, 2 days the second and so on.



If enough loans were made, then Garubia's economy would grow fantastically. The value of a day's work might grow so substantially that both the woman and the lender would benefit overwhelmingly.

At the same time, the woman would never find herself crushed by debt. If the economy shrunk, so would the amount she had to pay. Instead of being based risk, Baruch's loans would be based on hope and opportunity.

But Yakobi knew he needed a vast web of lenders and a vast web of borrowers for his vision to work. All of Garubia needed to be uplifted. And so, he visited bankers and financiers and politicians. He sat down for meeting after meeting. But he was rejected again and again. He felt his heart crumbling in the face of hopelessness. Those he met felt it as well. They knew his cause was hopeless.

When Rosh Hashana came, he stood during the *Birkat Kohanim* (the Priestly Blessing). As he listened, he suddenly understood the blessing in an entirely new way.

The Kohanim (Priests) intoned: *May the Everlasting G-d (YKVK) Bless You and Keep You.*

Yakobi heard: *May you be given the opportunity to connect to Forever, and may you be protected from your shortcomings.*

The Kohanim (Priests) chanted: *May the Timeless Lord Shine His Face Upon You, and Give You Grace*

Yakobi remembered that light was the first thing created by intention. It represented the opposite of chaos and chance. Yakobi remembered that G-d's goodness is the past and G-d's face is the future. And Yakobi knew that grace, whether given by G-d or man, represented finding something worthwhile in the soul of another.

And so he heard: *May you know that the future*

has intent, and that each of you has a role to play.

The Kohanim (Priests) chanted: *May the Timeless Lord lift His face towards you, and grant you peace.*

In his mind, Yakobi saw an old movie where the leading man lifts of the chin of the woman he loves and says, "here's lookin' at you." Yakobi imagined himself face-to-face with the future. The future that promised two thousand generations of kindness. But he was not just looking at it, he was being embraced by it and connected to it. The divine was becoming a part of him.

It was then that Yakobi saw a vision of the future, a vision in which his ideas served as a basis for blessing and kindness. It was so real, he could almost touch it.

For the first time in a long time, Baruch Yakobi found himself at peace.

Day 1 Torah Reading

Sarah

The very first line we read in Sarah's story is:

וַיִּקַּח פָּקֵד אֶת-שָׂרָה

I translate this as 'the Timeless G-d settled his account with Sarah'. The word פָּקֵד *pakad* is used for reckoning (see the Appendix). Because Sarah was deserving of a child, G-d granted her a child.

This is the path of blessing people because they deserve it – of giving them a good grade because they have performed well in your course.

As we imagine our people living the path of Sarah, we have to set aside our differences. Rather than focusing on what we don't like about our fellow Jews, let us find the best in everybody,

and imagine what blessings could be unlocked for a people who uplift.

Hagar & Yishmael

The second story is of Yishmael being rescued in the desert. Hagar prays for him, but G-d does not answer Hagar. Why does G-d rescue Yishmael – the forefather of the Arab people? The text makes it clear: G-d promised Avraham and Hagar that Yishmael would grow up and be the forefather of a people of his own.

Whenever G-d must intervene to rescue somebody (or even something) in order to honor His contracts, the word זָכַר *zocher* is used. We translate it as 'remember', but G-d does not need to remember. Sometimes, he can't let nature run its course. He needs to intervene, or His obligations will be invalidated; and His place in this world will be undermined.



This is the second path of blessing: we need it to survive. G-d promised our forefathers, and Moshe, that our people would survive and eventually flourish.

If the tidal wave of global antisemitism continues to grow, then we will face an existential crisis. Even if we deserve to be eliminated, we need *zocher* so that we can survive. We need to pray for intervention. It is not hard to imagine this reality.

Avimelech

The story of Avimelech can seem irrelevant. It is anything but. Just before the Rosh Hashana reading, in Chapter 20, Avimelech kidnaps Sarah. Married or not, a 90-year-old woman ought to be able to walk down the street

without getting abducted by a local warlord. G-d warns Avimelech off. Avimelech responds as many do when caught in fundamental error – he gets angry and accuses Avraham of being in the wrong. In this reading, Avimelech realizes this error. He comes to Avraham and says: 'God is with thee in all that thou doest...' He then asks Avraham to treat him well: "Now therefore swear unto me here by God that thou wilt not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my son's son..."

He wants to be a part of Avraham's forever.

This is the earliest case of the third path of blessing: I now recognize what is important and I want to be a part of it. I want blessing so that I can be a part of it.

This is the path of repentance, of *teshuva*.

Day 2 Reading

The Sacrifice of Isaac

Because of the story of the Akeidah - the Sacrifice of Isaac - Avraham is held up by the Torah as a unique paragon. He is a never-to-be-repeated example of our people's dedication to G-d, despite the price that might be paid.

Of course, his example *is repeated*. It is repeated in every generation. Despite the risks we are exposed to, we choose to be Jews. We choose not to disappear. Beyond that, we indelibly mark our boys as Jews. The world will hate them and their lives will be at risk. But we dedicate them to G-d, nonetheless.

This year, this idea is more than an abstract concept or a distant threat. G-d breathed His soul into man. We believe that all people have an intrinsic value. This has led us to conduct a war in which we have risked our own people - our own sons - when our aims could have been achieved at a far lower cost.

Instead of flattening Gaza from the air, instead of

treating our enemies as they dream of treating us, instead of erasing those dedicated to erasing us - we have gone in on foot and by tank. We have worked methodically, block by block and tunnel by tunnel. We have sacrificed more than 900 of our sons and our daughters because we embrace the values of our G-d.

Hamas and its people make no distinction between soldier and civilian. Such a distinction is artificial in a war between peoples. They want to erase all of us; logically we should want to erase them. But we do not. In the hope that something better is possible, we seek to preserve life; even the lives of those who may want to exterminate us. We seek to draw distinctions. Not between soldier and civilian, but between those who insist on martyrdom and those who may yet seek a better future.

Just like Avraham, we have sacrificed our sons to the ideals of our G-d. We should not be defensive, standing before the court of international opinion. Instead, we should be proud.

Now we pray for the voice that cries out "do not send your hand against the boy." The voice that tells us we can, at long last, have peace. The voice that tells us we can safely walk in the path of G-d.

The Children of Nachor

Right after the Akeidah, a messenger comes and tells Avraham that his brother has 12 kids from 2 wives. For a moment, put yourself in Avraham's shoes. One son has been chased away and another was almost sacrificed. That second son is estranged. He has either left or is about to leave in order to pray at Hagar's well. You're in your 90s. The text tells us that your wife died in a different city than you were living in, suggesting you were estranged. You have a great deal of money, but you seem to have nothing that is truly important.

Then, you hear that your brother has 12 kids.

By any human measure, Avraham was a failure

and Nachor was the family's great success.

But that isn't the reality. We read this today and wonder why Nachor's little addendum is even included. Why does Nachor matter?

Nachor matters for the perspective he provides. At the time, Avraham's life seemed like a failure, but Avraham was so impactful that more than half the world's population claims to be his spiritual descendants. Avraham could know that he was blessed, no matter the evidence to the contrary, because he trusted in the blessings of G-d.

Although we can access the Three Gates of Blessing, it is only through faith and trust in G-d that we can know that we have been blessed.

No assessment of our reality will reveal what our legacy will be. But with the honor of G-d, the Fear of G-d and the living of G-d's values, we can be a part of the infinite.

The Offerings

Why would we care about the animal offerings brought on Rosh Hashana? How can we connect to them in our modern age?

The answer is in the symbolism of those offerings.

- When the angels come to tell Sarah that she will have a child, Avraham serves them a calf. We offer a calf as a symbolic reminder of the path of pakad and how Sarah was blessed.
- When Yitzchak (Isaac) is rescued from the Akeidah because of G-d's obligation to Avraham, a ram is substituted for him. And so we offer a ram as a reminder of the path of zocheh. Critically for the shofar, the ram also serves as a symbol of the fear of G-d Avraham demonstrated by bringing Yitzchak as an offering.
- Finally, there are the seven lambs. When Avraham makes Avimelech testify – essentially to Avraham's claims – they use seven lambs. This is the symbolic offering that harkens back to the third path of blessing – the path of teshuva.

Shofar

Trying as hard as she can to remain stoic, the woman steps up to the piano. She is deeply familiar with the music she is about to play. She heard it, as it came into creation. Her husband was the man who composed it. As he worked, she heard the paths not taken, the motifs abandoned, and the glorious beauty that ultimately emerged.

And then, before a single concert could celebrate her husband's masterpiece, he was struck down in the prime of his life. Today is his memorial.

Thirty days have passed since he was taken from her.

While music is not normally a part of such a memorial, an exception has been made for this occasion.

The woman sits, and then she begins to play. She is an accomplished musician. On any normal day, her audience would be marveling at her talent and the beauty she adds to whatever she plays. But today, *she* is not playing. No, today she is channeling the man she loved.

The gathered friends and family close their eyes. And what they hear are not her fingers, or her voice. No, they hear him. They hear his music as it was poured out to her. They can feel his presence as if he were in the room with them.

When they open their eyes, they are in a new reality. Yes, the composer has been taken. But the composer remains a part of their lives.

There is nothing more essential to the Rosh Hashana service than the Shofar. My brother points out that when Adam is created, G-d breathed His divine soul into him. Today, when we speak, our voices combine that divine spirit with our own physical souls. The notes that He composed are joined with our mortal reality.

But Rosh Hashana is different. We blow through a ram's horn. The ram, from the Sacrifice of Isaac, is the symbol of the Fear of G-d. The Fear of G-d is the subsuming of our own will and our own voice to allow space for the divine. This is why we use the horn. The horn traps the ram. It constrains it to the will of G-d.

When we blow through the shofar, our physical voice is minimized. We cannot form words and only the most talented can form a tune. When we blow through the shofar, all that remains of our voice is the shadow of the breath of G-d. Just as the pianist channels the voice of her lost husband, those who blow the shofar are channeling the voice of G-d.

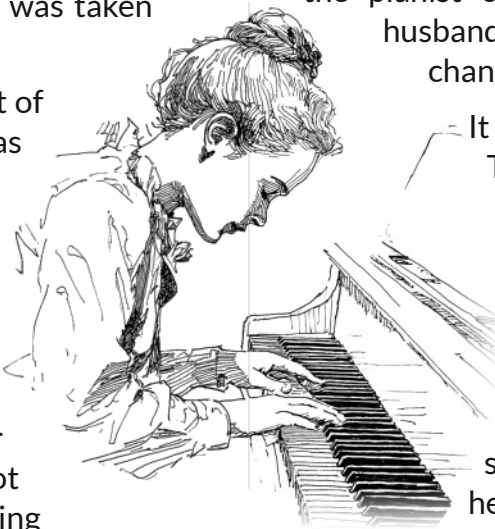
It is because of this that the Tehillim (Psalms) we recite just before the blowing of the Shofar say: *Hashem b'kol Shofar*. G-d is in the voice of the Shofar.

It is because of this that the command is to *listen* and not to blow. The one who blows is simply a vehicle for those who hear.

The shofar is blown with three notes:

- In the Book of Bamidbar (Numbers) the Teruah is blown to call the people to march on the command of the Almighty. It is nine quick notes.
- Shevarim refers to cracking grain to remove the outer husk. It refers to breaking something down to expose its core and reveal its true value. It is three longer notes.
- Tekiah, which is one long blast, requires the least thought. It represents the most fundamental force. The force of divine displacement.

When we combine these notes in different ways, we once again see the three paths of blessing. In every set, the Tekiah is there to shove us away from our previous path. To awaken us so we can



listen and then change. It is the central notes carry the core messages.

- Shevarim - three blasts - be broken down to your core. This is the path of blessing because we need it to survive.
- Teruah - nine quick blasts: This is the call to march. It is as if we are following the command of our King. No argument is needed; we just move. This is the path of blessing because we deserve it.
- Shevarim-Teruah - three and then nine. This is the path of being broken down, and then marching with G-d. Here we are blessed because we will use our blessings well, despite our track record.

It is tempting to see this final path as one of regret, of seeing our sins because we are in the presence of G-d. There is a second understanding, though. When we recognize we are in the

presence of G-d, we recognize the opportunities G-d provides us with. The student who does better at the end of the semester might be improving through fear of a bad grade – but they also might be improving because they recognize the value of the material itself. They recognize the opportunity being created for them.

When we hear these last notes, we are not just breaking down. We are exposing a wonderful and powerful core. We are recognizing what is possible in the presence of G-d.

When the shofar is being blown, listen to the call of the one guiding the shofar blower. When they say Tekiah, allow yourself to be displaced. When they say Shevarim, allow yourself to feel your desperation. When they say Teruah, fill yourself with the honor of G-d. And when they say Shevarim-Teruah, be aware of the presence of Hashem and what that presence enables.

Musaf

The Musaf prayer contains three special sections. Each of these harken back to the paths of blessing.

- With Malchiut (Kingship) we stand before the **King**. Because you feel the honor of being in the presence of G-d the King, you are deserving of blessing.
- With Zichronot (from *zocher*) we stand before the **Judge**. We are making a legal case for our blessings, based on G-d's covenant.
- With Shofarot (from *shofar*) we stand before the **Voice**. We recognize the power and righteousness of G-d's path and endeavor to walk in his ways.

In each of these sections, we blow a complete set of notes. We are listening and allowing ourselves to be moved through honor, fear and opportunity

before the King, the Judge, and the Voice.

The final notes – after the Amidah – reiterate all of these concepts.

All but the very last note, that is. In Ashkenazi communities, that last note is a Tekiah Gedolah – a great Tekia. It is a final displacement, and it is meant to change as and move us as surely as the breath of the shofar blower is expelled from his instrument. But in Mizrahi communities, that final note is a Teruah Gedolah – a great Teruah. There the call is to march. Not to be displaced, but to move into the world as a part of G-dliness.

It is, in a way, to form ourselves into G-d's glorious motorcade.

I like to imagine both notes together opening the doors of blessing and writing us into the Book of Life.

Contributors

Joseph Cox Contributing Editor

Joseph Cox was raised in rural Oregon. His parents and older siblings became religious in the Idaho wilderness, 10 hours from the nearest town. They used the Shulchan Aruch as a guidebook to rustic living and the weekly Torah portion as a way of keeping track of the date. Joseph's eldest brother died in an accident in Idaho and the family left that day.

Joseph has authored 12 books. The only non-fiction book, *A Multi-Colored Coat*, tells the story of his family and the broad philosophical thoughts that contributed to this piece.

Today, Joseph runs *Stories that Celebrate*. *Stories that Celebrate* recognizes that what survives into the future is not our biographies, but our art. However, many of the most wonderful people are not artists. This is where *Stories that Celebrate* steps in. Joseph interviews people, or their families, and then creates stories - art - to recognize and celebrate their lives.

To learn more about *Stories that Celebrate*, visit storiesthatcelebrate.com.

Dr. Nir Boms

Dr. Boms is a research fellow at the Moshe Dayan Center at Tel Aviv University. He is the Chairman of the Syria Research Forum and the Gulf Israel Policy Forum, as well as the coordinator of the TAU Workshop on Israel and the Middle East and the Hiwar Forum for Intra-Regional Dialogue. Amongst additional affiliations he is a fellow at the International Institute for Counter Terrorism in Herzliya; a member of the board of the Israeli Council on Foreign Relations and the Institute for monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education. He Co - Founded of CyberDissidents.org (now Movements.org), a network of bloggers from the Middle East that

focuses on freedom of expression and the promotion of dialogue in the region. Under the framework of his educational and peace endeavors, he co-founded the Tiyul-Rihla project, in 2012, an initiative bringing Israelis and Palestinians together to travel and learn the history and identity of each other. Dr. Boms served in the Israeli Défense Forces as a communications officer and holds the rank of Major (Res).

Dr. Agi Boms

Dr. Agata Miodowska Boms is a researcher of political extremism and an Assistant Professor at Jagiellonian University where she teaches about the challenge of radicalization today. She is a co-founder of the Institute of Social Safety and an expert with the Counter Extremism Project. She is an expert of the Radicalization Awareness Network operating at the European Commission and has testified to the European Commission of the subject radicalization and antisemitism in Europe. She is also a senior educator at the Auschwitz-Burkenau Museum.

Dr. Miodowska hold a PhD in philosophy from Jagiellonian University, focusing on Neo-nazi ideologies and hold a MA in Political Science from the University of Warsaw. Her academic specialization includes: radical political movements and groups; extreme-right political movements and their international contacts; extreme left-wing political movements, left-wing and right-wing terrorism, religious fundamentalism, racism and propaganda.

Dr. Miodowska is affiliated with a number of NGOs and institutions as an expert, editor and volunteer. These include: The offices of the Ombudsman, the Never Again Association, the Dialogue Forum, the Bęc Change Foundation, the Wielkopolska Tenants' Association and the Nomada Society for Integration of Multicultural Society Association.

Rabbi Shalom Schwartz

Shalom Schwartz founded and is one of the leaders of The Aseret Movement which aims to establish the Ten Commandments as a central element of Israeli national identity and unify Jews everywhere through the core values of the Ten Commandments.

He initiated and is the executive producer of Tragic Awakening: A New Look at the Oldest Hatred, a film made by Raphael Shore, Wayne Kopping, and the Aseret Movement. The film is a response to the wakeup call of October 7 th for Israel, the Jewish People and all of humanity.

Shalom and his beloved wife Debbie are thrilled that they live in Jerusalem, Israel where they anticipate the return home of the entire family of the Jewish People.

You can find the Aseret Movement at aseret.org.il.

Hillel Fuld

Hillel Fuld, named Israel's top marketer and "The man transforming Startup Nation to Scale up Nation" by Forbes, is a tech journalist, startup marketer, and technology expert.

Hillel works with technology companies and accompanies them from idea to revenue. He also works with many leading tech brands as an influencer. These include Google, Oracle, Huawei, and many more.

Hillel's work has been featured in CNBC, Inc Magazine, Fast Company, Entrepreneur Magazine, TechCrunch, The Next Web, and many other leading tech publications.

Hillel was recently named the 7th most influential tech blogger on the Internet, and among the top 100 most influential social media personalities across the globe.

Appendices

The Face of G-d

After the Sin of the Calf, Moshe (Moses) prays for clemency. As a part of that process, he makes a very particular request. He says:

הָרְאֵנִי נָא, אֶת-כְּבוֹדְךָ

Please show me your Glory.

Why does Moshe ask for this? I think it is simply because it is far easier to relate to a deity you can see. The *person* of the Queen makes the idea of royalty tangible.

G-d rejects the request. He says:

אֲנִי אֶעֱבִיר כָּל-טוֹבִי עָלֶיךָ... וְרָאִיתָ, אֶת-
אֲחֻזְרִי; וּפָנִי, לֹא יֵרָאוּ

I will make all My Tov to pass before thee... You can see my back, but my face shall not be seen.

Despite the rejection, we do see something

tangible here. We have a partial image of G-d. G-d's back is *tov*.

At the very beginning of the Torah, we have a definition of *tov*. *Tov*, normally translated as 'good', is how G-d judges what he has created. Everything G-d created is seen as *tov* – except for Shabbat, Heaven, Night and – with some caveats we won't explore here – mankind. What distinguishes these things? We don't create on the Sabbath; the Heavens are not a place of Creation and G-d doesn't create at Night. This means *tov* is not goodness in the broad modern sense (after all, Shabbat is great but not good). Instead, *tov* is specifically associated with that which has been created and can play a part in further creation.

What is G-d's back? It is the wake G-d has left through His acts of creation.

G-d's 'back' is the past.

This is the first of the divine values: we should seek to leave a wake in our lives – a wake in which we add to the world through our creative efforts.

This first concept should give us an idea why seeing the face of G-d is beyond our comprehension. The face of G-d is the future. The most common physics model, in the era of quantum mechanics is one in which there are multiple possibilities at any moment. There are infinite possible universes. Think of the Spider-Verse. To see the face of G-d would be to see all those possibilities.

We can't survive that.

However... after Moshe rises early in the morning – eager to bring the people forward despite their sins, G-d reveals something to him. The text says:

וַיַּעֲבֹר יְהוָה עַל-פָּנָיו, וַיִּקְרָא, יְהוָה יְהוָה, קָל רַחוּם וְרַחוּן--אֲרַךְ אַפַּיִם, וְרַב-זֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת. נֹצֵר זֶסֶד לְאֲלֹפִים, נִשָּׂא עוֹן וּפְשָׁע וּזְטָאָה; וְנִקָּה, לֹא יִנָּקֶה-- פֹּקֵד עוֹן אֲבוֹת עַל-בְּנִים וְעַל-בְּנֵי בְנִים, עַל-שִׁלְשִׁים וְעַל-רַבָּעִים.

And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed:

'The LORD, the LORD, God, merciful and gracious, leveling out anger, and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy unto the thousandth generation, lifting sin and error and destructive acts; and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and unto the fourth generation.'

There have been entire books written about these two verses. I want to focus on just a few elements. The verse references mercy to the thousandth generation. Even today there haven't been thousands of generations since the first divinely aware man (Adam). From this we can understand that this verse is about the future.

In so much as we can comprehend it, this is the face of G-d and this is the future.

What are the values that define the face of G-d? Kindness. Graciousness, which is akin to finding a special role for each of us. There is the smoothing

over of anger. An abundance of Kindness and Truth. Most critically: G-d is a preserver of kindness for a thousand generations. We are mere mortals; we can barely define what happens in our own lives. But G-d can preserve a legacy forever.

G-d does this by lifting our failures from us. They don't survive us. Of course, not everything fails to survive us. There are those spiritual burdens and weights that we insist on. And, of course, there are those people who are fundamentally destroyers. However, the legacy of that spiritual darkness is short-lived.

Because it destroys, it cannot endure.

We can see this in our history. Our core was defined by Avraham and Sarah. By constraining and preserving the people within the legacy of Avraham and Sarah, G-d is doing them a kindness. He is preserving their kindness for two thousand generations. Likewise, the legacies of his children and grandchildren – particularly the descendants of Yishmael and Yaacov (Jacob) – continue to survive.

On the other hand, many powerful leaders of the past – like Nadir Shah, Emperor Qianlong, or Louis XV – left a trail of destruction. The states they managed lost influence or even collapsed. Their legacy, despite their enormous power, was short-lived. George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, the Baal Shem Tov and Adam Smith were their contemporaries. They had far less power and a far greater legacy.

Put together, these are the values that describe G-d in our world: Creation, repayment of kindness, grace, truth, repayment and preservation of kindness, the lifting of spiritual burdens and limitations on the effects of evil.

In this passage we call G-d YKVK – the connection of past, present and future.

G-d is eternity, and G-dly values are those that He allows to touch eternity.

Pakad

The word פָּקַד pakad is central to the Rosh Hashana experience. However, if you look at 20 translations, you'll find almost 20 different translations of the word. 'remembered', 'dealt with', 'graciously remembered', 'visited', 'was attentive to' 'cared for' 'took note as promised' etc.....

How can we bring all these translations together? The key is Bereshit 41:35. There, Yosef says to Pharaoh:

יַעֲשֶׂה פַרְעֹה, וַיִּפְקֹד פְּקָדִים עַל-הָאָרֶץ; וְזָמַשׁ אֶת-
אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם, בְּשִׁבְעַ שָׁנֵי הַשָּׁבַע.

Let Pharaoh do this, and let him 'pakad pakads' over the land, and take up the fifth part of the land of Egypt in the seven years of plenty.

Here the word is used back-to-back as a verb and a noun. There is this idea of choosing people to fill the role of 'pakad'. What does this mean?

Let's start by understanding what a single 'pakad' might do. The example here centers on the assessment and collection of tax.

In modern times, when we translate this word as 'overseers' we imagine men with whips driving their own people and then the Jewish people. We imagine strongmen. But history shows that these aren't the people that would be invoked for this position. Instead, it is the assessors and accountants who enable this sort of taxation. The Domesday book created by William the Conqueror enabled the very strong early English taxation system. It was created by assessors and accountants. The enforcers – when they were needed – were effectively just tools delivering on assessments that had already been recorded and established. The entry in the book was the fee – the rest was just collection. To give a much earlier example, we have found 10,000 clay tablet tax records from Lagash (2110 BCE) that show their tax records. The tax authorities themselves provided fodder for 50,000 sheep at just one tax collection station. They collected 188 million

liters of grain tax in one year. This was a serious job and required accountants and assessors. These accountants not only collected the tax, they distributed it. They assessed the needs of temples, families and the army and they supported them.

In ancient Egypt, approximately 1% of the population were literate scribes. Among those were the tax assessors who kept records about who owned what land and recorded crop yields. We tend to think of the 'assessors' and the 'tax collectors' and the 'paymasters' as three separate roles. But what if all three were the same. Even today, all three roles are filled by the same people: accountants.

To pakad would be to count. It would be to assess. It would be to choose deserving people. It would be to judge – based on the measured merits. AND, it would be to deliver on those calculations. It would be to 'settle accounts.' With an entry in G-d's double-entry ledger, kindness would be noted, a debt would be created and then that debt would eventually be settled.

Coming back to Sarah consider this:

G-d settled his account with Sarah as he had said and he did as he had spoken.

When you 'settle an account', you deliver what the other party deserves. In Sarah's case, that is blessing.