

A Dramatic Day in Dramatic Times: Breaking Yom Kippur

I. Eating and Working on Yom Kippur – Halacha and Aggadah

1. Mishna Yoma chapter 8, 4-7

With respect to children, one does not afflict them on Yom Kippur; however, one trains them one year before or two years before, so that they will be accustomed to mitzvot.	התינוקות, אין מעניין אותן ביום הכפורים, אכל מחנכין אותם לפני שנה ולפני שנתים, בשביל שיהיו רגילים במצוות:
With respect to a pregnant woman who smelled food, one feeds her until she recovers. If a person is ill, one feeds him according to experts. And if there are no experts there, feed him according to his own instructions, until he says: "Enough!"	עברה שהריחה, מאכילין אותה עד שתשיב נפשה. חולה מאכילין אותו על פי בקיאים. ואם אין שם בקיאים, מאכילין אותו על פי עצמו, עד שיאמר די:
One who is seized with a <i>bulmos</i> , feed him even impure foods until his eyes recover. One whom a mad dog bit, do not feed him from the lobe of its liver. And Rabbi Matya ben Harash permits it. Rabbi Matya ben Harash said: If one suffers pain in his throat, one may place medicine inside his mouth on Shabbat, because there is uncertainty whether it is life-threatening, and uncertainty concerning a threat to life overrides Shabbat.	מי שאחזו בלמוס, מאכילין אותו אפלו דברים טמאים, עד שיאורו עיניו. מי שנשכו קלב שוטה, אין מאכילין אותו מחצר כבד שלו, ורבי מתיא בן חרש מתיר. ועוד אמר רבי מתיא בן חרש, החושש בגרונו, מטילין לו סם בתוך פיו בשבת, מפני שהוא ספק נפשות, וכל ספק נפשות דוחה את השבת:
One upon whom a rockslide fell: there is uncertainty whether he is there or not; there is uncertainty whether he is alive or dead; and there is uncertainty whether he is a gentile or a Jew, one clears the pile from atop him. If they found him alive, they clear it from on him. And if dead, they should leave him.	מי שנפלה עליו מפלת, ספק הוא שם ספק אינו שם, ספק חי ספק מת, ספק נכרי ספק ישראל, מפקחין עליו את הגל. מצאוהו חי, מפקחין עליו. ואם מת, יניחוהו:

2. Shulchan Aruch Orach Hayyim 618:6, with Mishna Berurah's commentary

If a sick person eats on Yom Kippur and feels better enough that he can recite blessings, then he must mention Yom Kippur in his Grace After Meals, saying <i>Yaaleh Ve-Yavo</i> in the blessing for building Jerusalem.	חולה שאכל ביום הכפורים ונתיישב דעתו בענין שיכול לברך צריך להזכיר של יום הכפורים בברכת המזון, שאומר יעלה ויבא בבונה ירושלים:
Saying <i>Yaaleh Ve-Yavo</i> – the reason is that since his eating is permissible, Yom Kippur for him is like any other festival for the rest of us. And if Yom Kippur falls on Shabbat he should also say <i>Retzeh</i> . And there are those who are lenient to say that he doesn't even need to say <i>Yaaleh Ve-Yavo</i> , since that was	שואמר יעלה ויבוא – הטעם כיון דבהתירא אכל, הוה ליה יום הכיפורים כמו לדידן שאר יו"ט. ואם חל בשבת אומר רצה והחליצנו. ויש שמקילין בזה שאפילו יעלה ויבוא אין צריך לומר, שלא תקנו אלא במקום שמצוה

<p>only instituted for meals that are a mitzvah to eat on the holiday. And that would also be the case for Retzeh if it fell on Shabbat. In any case, he certainly should not make kiddush, since there is a concern about it being an unnecessary blessing.</p>	<p>באכילתו, והוא הדין שאין לומר רצה והחליצנו כשחל בשבת. ועל כל פנים, קידוש בודאי אין לו לעשות דיש חשש ברכה לבטלה.</p>
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**3. Shai Agnon, “Ha-Chalil”, from the collection *Yamim Noraim*, 1937.
Translation by Maurice Galpert.**

<p>The boy sat in The House of Prayer all Yom Kippur without praying, because he did not know how. During the Additional Prayer he said to his father. “Father, I want to play the flute.” His father became terrified and spoke sharply to the boy. The boy had to restrain himself. During the Afternoon Prayer the boy repeated again: “Father let me play on my flute.” Seeing that the boy wanted badly to play on his flute, his father said to him “Where is the flute? The child pointed to the pocket of his coat. The father therefore held the child’s pocket in his hand, to keep the boy from taking out the flute and playing on it.</p>	<p>היה הילד יושב כל יום הכפורים בבית המדרש, ולא התפלל, מפני שלא ידע כלום. בשעת תפילת מוסף אמר לאביו: אבא, רוצה אני לחלל בחלילי.” נתחלחל אביו וגער בו. נתאפק הילד על כרחו. בשעת תפילת מנחה חזר ואמר: “יהי מה, הרשני נא לחלל.” כיון שראה אביו של התינוק שהוא מבקש מאד לחלל, אמר לו: “היכן החלילי?”. הראה לו על כיס בגדו. נטל אביו של התינוק את כיס בגדו והחזיק בידו את הכיס עם החליל, כדי שלא יוציאו ויחלל בו.</p>
<p>Holding the pocket with the flute in this way, the man stood and prayed the Closing Prayer. In the middle of the prayer, the boy forced the flute out of his pocket and blew a blast so loud that all who heard it were taken aback.</p>	<p>עמד והתפלל תפילת נעילה, כשידו מחזקת בכיס ובחליל. באמצע התפילה שמט הנער בחזקה את החליל מתוך הכיס ומיד אביו ונתן קול גדול בחליל, עד שתמהו כל השומעים.</p>
<p>When the Baal Shem Tov heard the sound, he shortened his prayer. After the prayer the Baal Shem Tov said: “With the sound of this flute the child lifted up all the prayers and eased my burden. For this child does not know anything but by dint of his seeing and hearing the prayer of Israel all of this holy day, the prayer’s holy spark kindled a fire in him and the flames of his longing burned higher and higher until his soul nearly expired. Because of the strength of his longing he played the note of his heart truly, without any distraction, for the sole sake of the Name of God. Now the pure breath of his lips was very acceptable to Him and by this means all the prayers were lifted up.</p>	<p>כיון ששמע הבעש"ט את הקול, קיצר מכפי הרגלו. אחר התפילה אמר: תינוק זה בקול חלילו העלה כל התפילות והקל מעלי, שתינוק זה אינו יודע כלום, ומאחר שכל היום הקדוש ראה ושמע תפילת ישראל, נתלקח בו ניצוץ קדשו כמו אש ממש, ואש תשוקתו בערה בו בכל פעם יותר ויותר, עד כלות נפשו ממש, ובחזק תשוקתו חילל באמיתות נקודת לבו בלא שום פניה, רק לשמו יתברך לבדו, והבל פיו הנקי נתקבל מאד לפניו יתברך, ועל ידי זה העלה כל התפילות.</p>

IV. Yom Kippur During the Cholera Epidemic, 1848

4. David Frischmann (1859-1922), “Three Who Ate”

<p>Three people who ate....they did not eat on any regular day of the week, but on Yom Kippur. And not just on any Yom Kippur, but on Yom Kippur that fell on Shabbat. They didn't eat in secret, but in front of everyone gathered in the Great Synagogue. They weren't simple people or boors. These three were not frivolous. Rather they were the princes of the community and their most important leaders, none other than the rabbi of the city and the two Dayanim [rabbinic judges] who stood with him... Even now my eyes can picture that incredible sight, as I stood there in the congregation of the synagogue.</p>	<p>מעשה בשלשה שאכלו... לא באחד הימים הפשוטים מימי שבתות ה' אכלו את אשר אכלו, כי-אם ביום הכפורים, ביום הכפורים שחל להיות בשבת; לא במקום סתר באין רואה ובאין יודע, כי-אם לעיני כל ישראל, אשר בבית-הכנסת הגדול; ולא אנשים ריקים ופוחזים, לא קלי-דעת היו שלשת האנשים ההם, כי-אם מנשיאי העדה ואציליה הכי-נכבדים, הלא הם רב העיר ושני הדינים אשר עמו... וגם עתה עוד תרא עיני את כל המראה הגדול והנורא ההוא, ביום עמדי בבית-הכנסת בתוך הקהל!</p>
<p>Suddenly my ears heard a sound but I could not understand exactly what it was. I heard the sounds but my heart could not comprehend. “With the permission of God and with the permission of the community, we hereby permit people to eat and to drink today.” As this was happening the beadle brought a cup of wine and some cake from the rabbi's home.</p>	<p>ופתאום ואזני שומעות קול דברים ולא אבין להם עד מה, כי אל תוך אזני באים הדברים ואל תוך לבי פנימה לא יבואו. "על דעת המקום ועל דעת הקהל אנו מתירין—לאכל ולשתות היום!" בין כה וכה והשמש מביא מבית הרב, אשר בחצר, כוסות יין לקדש ועגות-מצות קטנות.</p>
<p>If I live for many more years I will never forget that incredible day and that awesome sight. If I close my eyes for a moment I can still see them before me: the three who ate! The three shepherds of Israel standing on the Bima in the synagogue, eating in front of everyone, on Yom Kippur.</p>	<p>ואני, אם שָׁנים הרבה אחיה, את היום ההוא ואת המראה הגדול והנורא הזה לא אשכח לנצח; וגם עתה, אם אסגר רגע אחד את עפעפי עיני, עוד אראה אותם לנגדי: שלשה שאכלו! שלשת רועי-ישראל עומדים על הבמה אשר בבית-הכנסת והם אוכלים לעיני כל ישראל ביום הכפורים!</p>

5. Yankev Mark, *Gedolim Fun Unzer Zeit*, 1927, trans. Jeremy Brown

I would like to tell you about an event that is told about R Yisroel Salanter, that during a cholera epidemic he made kiddish on Yom Kippur in the Great Synagogue of Vilna. He did this to show the community that they should not fast, and he did this over the protests of the Dayanim of Vilna. This famous story has entered Jewish literature, and is presented as a fact. But it is really only a legend. I once had a conversation with Rabbi Shimon Shtarshun of Vilna, who was an eyewitness in the Vilna Shul. He told me the story was as follows. One the eve of Yom Kippur, with the permission of the leading rabbis, Rabbi Salanter posted announcements in all the shuls that because of the cholera epidemic they would not say the piyutim, and that instead people should spend time outdoor breathing fresh air. In the courtyard of all the shuls they set up tables with pieces of cake that contained less than the prohibited amount of food that may be eaten. The food was there for those who needed to eat. Reb Yisroel [Salanter] got up on at Shacharit on Yom

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Kippur and announced that if a person felt weak there was no need to consult with a doctor, but instead they may go into the courtyard and eat.

III. The Yom Kippur War

6. Rabbi A. H. Rabinowitz, “Why Yom Kippur?”, *Tradition*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Fall 1975)

“Rabbi, why did it happen on *Yom Kippur*?” The question was voiced by a young female trainee during one of my sessions at the officer’s training school. What Jewish historical logic lies beneath the surface? Where in the maze of the bewildering labyrinth of Messianic times lies the key? The Jewish soul and consciousness were stirred in an unfathomable manner that relate to the essence of Jewish being. Why *Yom Kippur*?

... Tradition has it that sincerely uttered prayers on Yom Kippur, uttered in an atmosphere of calm spirituality and detachment from worldly affairs, gather all the gabbled prayers of the year in their ascent to the Throne of Glory. Alas, it was not to be. The morning service started on time, but that was about all. Every few minutes someone called out: “Rabbi, we need technicians to load the Hawks for transport.” And so, in between prayers, I was busy persuading soldiers that they must leave the synagogue and go to their tasks. “But it is Yom Kippur!”

This is the mitzvah of this Yom Kippur. I know how you feel, but this is what you must do – now. You had better put on your boots or else you won’t be able to do your job properly. Yes, you may use the walkie talkie to coordinate the work. You cannot smoke. You may not call your girlfriend to say goodbye. You may take your kit and tefillin...

The Jew has an appointment with destiny. He can do one of two things; the choice is his. He can cop out and assimilate or he can strive to keep the appointment. We know how history deals with complacency. It is time to face reality – as men and as Jews.

It had to be *Yom Kippur*. It could only have happened on *Yom Kippur*. Because *Yom Kippur* is that moment in Jewish life when a man faces himself. When a people comes face to face with its being, with its past and with its future.

IV. A Dramatic Prayer for A Dramatic Time

7. Text of Unetaneh Tokef, the Yom Kippur Prayers

<p>We lend power to the holiness of this day. For it is tremendous and awe filled, and on it your kingship will be exalted, your throne will be established in loving-kindness, and you will sit on it in truth. It is true that you are the one who judges, and reproves, who knows, and bears witness, who inscribes, and seals, who reckons and enumerates. You remember all that is forgotten. You open the book of</p>	<p>וּנְתַנֶּה תְּקֵף קִדְשֵׁי הַיּוֹם כִּי הוּא נוֹרָא וְאֵימָה וְבוֹ תִּשָּׂא מַלְכוּתְךָ וְיִכּוֹן בְּחֶסֶד כְּסֵאֲךָ וְתִשָּׁבַע עָלֶיךָ בְּאַמְתֵּךְ. אֲמֵת כִּי אַתָּה הוּא דִּין וּמוֹכֵיחַ וְיֹדֵעַ וְעֹד וְכוֹתֵב וְחוֹתֵם וְסוֹפֵר וּמוֹנֵה וְתוֹזֵכֵר כָּל הַנְּשָׁכָחוֹת וְתִפְתַּח אֶת סֵפֶר הַזְּכוֹרוֹנוֹת וּמְאֵלֶיךָ יִקְרָא וְחוֹתֵם יָד כָּל אָדָם בּוֹ. וּבְשׁוֹפֵר גָּדוֹל יִתְקַע וְקוֹל דְּמָמָה דַּקָּה יִשְׁמַע וּמִלְאָכֶיךָ</p>
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<p>records, and from it shall be read. In it lies each person's insignia. And a great shofar is sounded, and a thin silent voice shall be heard. And the angels shall be alarmed, and dread and fear shall seize them as they proclaim: behold! the Day of Judgment on which the hosts of heaven shall be judged, for they too shall not be judged blameless by you, and all creatures shall parade before you as a herd of sheep. As a shepherd herds his flock, directing his sheep to pass under his staff, so you shall pass, count, and record the souls of all living, and decree a limit to each person's days, and inscribe their final judgment.</p>	<p>יִתְחַזְזוּן וְחִיל וְרֵעָדָה יֵאָחֲזוּן וַיֵּאָמְרוּ הֲנֵה יוֹם הַדִּין לְפָקֹד עַל צָבָא מְרוֹם בְּדִין כִּי לֹא יִזְכּוּ בְּעֵינֵיהֶם בְּדִין וְכָל בָּאֵי עוֹלָם יַעֲבְרוּן לְפָנֶיהָ כְּכִנֵּי מְרוֹן כְּבִקְרַת רוּעָה עָדְרוּ מֵעֵבִיר צֹאנֵה תַחַת שִׁבְטֹו כֹּן תַּעֲבִיר וְתִסְפֹּר וְתִמְנְהַ וְתִפְקֹד נִפְשׁ כָּל חַי וְתִחַתְּהָ קִצְבָה לְכָל בְּרִיָּה וְתִכְתֹּב אֶת גְּזֵר דֵּינָם.</p>
<p>On Rosh Hashanah it is inscribed, and on Yom Kippur it is sealed - how many shall pass away and how many shall be born, who shall live and who shall die, who in good time, and who by an untimely death, who by water and who by fire, who by sword and who by wild beast, who by famine and who by thirst, who by earthquake and who by plague, who by strangulation and who by lapidation, who shall have rest and who wander, who shall be at peace and who pursued, who shall be serene and who tormented, who shall become impoverished and who wealthy, who shall be debased, and who exalted. But repentance, prayer and righteousness avert the severity of the decree.</p>	<p>בְּרֵאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה יִפְתָּחוּן, וּבַיּוֹם צוֹם כְּפוּר יִחַתְּמוּן. כַּמָּה יַעֲבְרוּן, וְכַמָּה יִבְרָאוּן, מִי יִחְיֶה, וּמִי יָמוּת, מִי בְּקִצּוֹ, וּמִי לֹא בְּקִצּוֹ, מִי בְּמֵיִם, וּמִי בְּאֵשׁ, מִי בְּחַרְבּ, וּמִי בְּחִיָּה, מִי בְּרֵעֵב, וּמִי בְּצָמָא, מִי בְּרֵעֵשׁ, וּמִי בְּמַגָּפָה, מִי בְּחִנִּיקָה, וּמִי בְּסִקִּילָה, מִי יָנוּחַ, וּמִי יָבוּעַ, מִי יִשְׁקֹט, וּמִי יִטָּרַף, מִי יִשְׁלֹו, וּמִי יִתְיַסֵּר, מִי יַעֲנִי, וּמִי יַעֲשִׂיר, מִי יִשְׁפֹּל, וּמִי יָרוּם. וְתִשׁוּבָה וְתִפְלָה וְצַדִּיקָה מַעֲבִירוּן אֶת רֵעַ הַגְּזֵרָה.</p>
<p>...We come from dust, and return to dust. We labour by our lives for bread, we are like broken shards, like dry grass, and like a withered flower; like a passing shadow and a vanishing cloud, like a breeze that passes, like dust that scatters, like a fleeting dream. But You are the king who lives eternal.</p>	<p>...אָדָם יִסּוּדוֹ מֵעֶפֶר וְסוּפוֹ לְעֶפֶר. בְּנִפְשׁוֹ יָבִיא לְחַמוֹ. מְשׁוּל כְּחֶרֶס הַנִּשְׁבֵּר, כְּחִצִּיר יָבֵשׁ, וְכַצִּיץ נוֹבֵל, כְּצֵל עוֹבֵר, וְכַעָנָן פֹּלֵה, וְכַרוּחַ נוֹשֵׁבֶת, וְכַאֲבָק פּוֹרֵחַ, וְכַחֲלוֹם יְעוּף. וְאַתָּה הוּא מֶלֶךְ אֵל חַי וְקַיִם.</p>

8. Leonard Cohen, “Who by Fire?”, 1974

And who by fire, who by water
Who in the sunshine, who in the night time
Who by high ordeal, who by common trial
Who in your merry merry month of may
Who by very slow decay
And who shall I say is calling?

And who in her lonely slip, who by barbiturate
Who in these realms of love, who by something blunt

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Who by avalanche, who by powder
Who for his greed, who for his hunger
And who shall I say is calling?

And who by brave assent, who by accident
Who in solitude, who in this mirror
Who by his lady's command, who by his own hand
Who in mortal chains, who in power
And who shall I say is calling?

9. Quotes from Unetaneh Tokef: A Documentary Film about the Yom Kippur War, by Yehuda Yaniv

<p>Amihai Yarhi: I have two Yom Kippurs. The Yom Kippur when the war broke out, and there is the Yom Kippur that belongs to all of the Jewish people and goes through all the generations. The Yom Kippur of the war, to me was the end of an era and the beginning of a new era, that in my opinion Beit Hashittah and the state of Israel has not yet recovered from.</p>	<p>עמיחי ירחי: לי יש שני ימי כיפורים. היום כיפור שבו פרצה המלחמה, ויש יום כיפור אחר ששייך לכל עם ישראל והוא הולך מזה דורות מדור לדור. יום הכיפורים של המלחמה היה מבחינתי איזה שהוא סיום של תקופה ופתיחה של תקופה חדשה שלפי דעתי בית השיטה ומדינת ישראל עדיין לא התאוששו ממנה.</p>
<p>Yossi Asaf: Yom Kippur after the war is completely different from everything before the war. It doesn't just come down to the question of content, meaning "what do we do this evening?" I think that the public – definitely me but also the public – after the Yom Kippur war, they are in. They come in their masses. Something happened to them.</p>	<p>יוסי אסף: יש משהו אחר לחלוטין ביום הכיפור מלאחר מלחמת יום הכיפורים מאשר כל מה שקדם לו. זה מתמצה לא רק בשאלה התוכנית, כלומר "מה עושים הערב?". אני חושב שהציבור – אני בוודאי אבל הציבור – לאחר מלחמת יום כיפור הוא לשם. קודם כל הוא בא בהמוניו. כנראה קרה לו משהו.</p>
<p>Aryeh Ben Gurion: when the terrible war came, the war of survival, the Yom Kippur War, and eleven of our boys fell in battle, the power of it, the influence of it, the footsteps it left in our memory, the marks on our hearts. It took on an additional strength. Yom Kippur, which had been a religious day to which we had given the interpretation of Memorializing the Dead, became the day of the Zionist Yom Kippur war. To the religious interpretation of Yom Kippur was added an additional dimension of Zionist survival in the land and State of Israel.</p>	<p>אריה בן גוריון: כשהגיע המלחמה הנוראה הזאת, של מלחמת ההשרדות, של מלחמת יום כיפור, ונפלו י"א בנים, זה העוצמה של זה, ההשפעה של זה, העקבות שזה הותיר בזיכרון, בשריטות שבלב. זה קיבל עוצמה נוספת. ויום הכיפורים, שהיה יום דתי ואנחנו נתנו לו את האינרפרטציה של הזכרת נשמות, הוא הפך להיות ליום של מלחמת יום כיפור הציונית. לפירושה של יום כיפור הדתי נוסף מימד של הישרדות ציונית בארץ ישראל במדינת ישראל.</p>