



ותשובה ותפלה וצדקה מעבירין את רע הגזרה:

“But T’shuvah (reconciliation), T’fillah (prayer) and Tz’dakah (working to build a more just world) have the power to transform the harshness of our destiny.”

תשובה & Reconciliation

Mishneh Torah, Law of Repentance 2:9

אין התשובה ולא יום הכפורים מכפרין אלא על עברות שבין אדם למקום ... אבל עברות שבין אדם לחברו ... אינו נמחל לו לעולם עד שימתן לחברו מה שהוא חייב לו וירצהו. (משנה תורה, הלכות תשובה ב:ט)

Repenting [before God] and [the prayers of] Yom Kippur only atone for sins committed between a human being and God ... but for sins between one human and another, one can only be absolved by making restitution for what is owed and seeking forgiveness from the victim.

As we approach the Days of Awe at this deeply broken moment, Maimonides' famous text on repentance calls us to do the hard work of making restitution with those we have victimized. When extremists and right-wing settlers perpetrate acts of violence, desecrate holy places, vandalize, and destroy property in Israel and the Occupied Territories, NIF grantee Tag Meir organizes condolence visits to victims of terror. They paint over racist graffiti and offer material support to religious spaces that have been defaced. This is the kind of work that fulfills Rambam's prescription for how real t'shuvah is done, inspiring us to re-dedicate ourselves to the fight against racism and hatred at home and in Israel in the year ahead.

תפילה Prayer

Mishnah Ta'anit 2:2

עמדו בתפלה, מזרידין לפני התבה זקן ורגיל, ויש לו בנים, וביתו ריקם, כדי שיהא לבו שלם בתפלה

When the (public) prayers begin (on a fast day) we assign to lead the community in prayer one who is an elder, well versed in the prayers, who has children, and whose house is empty (of food), so that the leader's heart is fully engaged by the prayers...

הנני Prayer from the High Holiday Liturgy

וקבל תפילתי כתפילת זקן ורגיל ופרקו נאה וזקנו מגדל וקולו נעים ומערב בדעת עם הבריות

Accept my prayer as the prayer of one who is mature and experienced [in prayer], and as one who is respected, whose beard is full-grown, whose voice is pleasant, and whose awareness is connected with all people.¹

¹ As contemporary readers we question rabbinic assumptions around gender, age, and family structure and reframe them for our context.



In these two texts, our sages call us to think very carefully about who will lead us in prayer in the most precarious times—including the *Yamim Noraim*. They adjure us to find leaders who have experienced hardship along with the community and will lead with intensity and intention. As we enter a new year, one which will begin just as painfully as the year we are closing, we look desperately for new leaders to inspire us and create real change. We seek out new leadership from diverse communities, those invested in partnership and transformation. The Alliance Fellowship, an action-based, two-year program funded by NIF, helps emerging progressive political leaders — Jews and Arabs, Mizrahim and Haredim, across genders and sexual orientations — learn to trust one another, and develop skills to promote civic equality and work for real political change together. They will become the messengers of change for their communities and for Israeli society.

Giving & Acts of Service Rooted in Justice צדקה

Talmud: Bava Batra 8a

תנו רבנן קופה של צדקה נגבית בשנים ומתחלקת בשלשה נגבית בשנים שאין עושים שררות על הצבור פחות משנים ומתחלקת בשלשה כדיני ממונות (בבא בתרא ח.)

Our Sages taught: Charitable funds are collected by two people and then distributed by a panel of three people... because making the choices about who should receive — and not receive — these funds is comparable to the laws surrounding panels of judges that make financial rulings.

The Talmud here recognizes the heavy burden of choosing how to distribute a community's limited charitable dollars. As we look out at the year ahead, we see a US and global economy in tatters, mass unemployment, and a critical election in the US just weeks away. We are more keenly attuned than ever to concerns about the impact of our limited charitable dollars. In times of crisis, we weigh our *tz'dakah* decisions carefully: We want to respond to the moment, and help those in urgent need, while still continuing to uphold our lifelong values and commitments.

When the pandemic first hit Israel, NIF shifted resources in response. It allocated emergency funds to Physicians for Human Rights—Israel who were well-equipped to provide for the human rights and health care needs of those most marginalized: Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, incarcerated people, asylum seekers, and others. Limited resources often necessitate creative collaboration: NIF amplified a joint public awareness campaign of Israel Women's Network (IWN), Women Against Violence (WAV), and Al-Tufula Center to advance a rapid governmental policy response to the increased risk of violence against women during the country-wide lockdown.

The new year will bring continued challenges and require some hard choices. We meet it with a renewed commitment to *t'shuvah*, *t'fillah*, and *tz'dakah*, to doing the hard work, and amplifying the voices and supporting the efforts of those who seek justice and pursue peace.