

Nourishment for the Neshama

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Reflections on Yom Kippur 5768

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During the course of davening today, Yom Kippur, and because of reports in the newspapers of open threats against Eretz Yisroel, the idea came to me to continue certain prayers in this davening through at least Hoshana Rabba.

The year 5768 is 68 years after Germany invaded Poland, in September 1939 when the year was 5700, leaving only 300 years left on the Hebrew calendar. This remembrance was in my mind during davening, during the reading of the Martyrs, and during the reading of Yonah.

The prayers below reflect the sections that stood out to me in the context of our condition today and our condition 68 years ago which began the destruction of millions of innocent, holy souls, killed for no reason other than they were Jews, senseless loss and destruction that ripped away from us our great-grandparents, our relatives, cousins, Rebbes, role models and more. Bereft. For what? May their memory be a blessing. Eretz Yisroel, formed as a secular state, followed this terrible loss. A secular state that Baruch Hashem continues today, although when have we had peace? Perhaps we can beseech Hashem in the prayers below to spare us now, to bring Moshiach, to overlook our faults and our failings on their account, that their loss of life and our pain over their loss be credited to our spiritual account so that we may be spared today any pain due us for our failures and inadequacies.

In the Musaf service, there is a hymn that starts Asher Aimoten, a mystical hymn that expresses the magnificent vision of a devout poet:

Though thou art revered by the faithful and mighty angels,
Formed of ice and of flashing light, for thy awe is on them,
Yet Thou desirest praise from dust-made men dwelling on earth,
Who fall short and are poor in good deeds- and that is thy fame!

Though thou art revered by roaring camps of angelic hosts,
In the assemblies of myriads, for thy awe is on them, Yet thou desirest praise from men whose glory fades away,
Who lack sense and contemplate evil-and that is thy fame!

Though thou are revered by the widely extended heavens,
The serene celestial spaces, for thy awe is on them,
Yet thou desirest praise from men who are tainted with sin,
Caught in a snare, steeped in bitterness – and that is thy fame!

Though thou art revred by the lofty and resplendent skies,
The firmament and the floating clouds, for thy awe is on them,
Yet thou desirest praise from men impure and full of grief,
Faithless thought ended by thee from birth – and that is thy fame!

Though thou art revered by those exclaiming Holy, Blessed,
Six-winged angels with four faces, for thy awe is on them,
Yet thou desirest praise from men worthless and deceptive,
Far from truth and void of righteousness-and that is thy fame!

Though thou art revered by sparkling angels and water-paths,

Exalted hills and high mountains, for thy awe is on them,
Yet thou desirest praise from men who are mere fleeting breath,
Grass that withers, a passing shadow, a fading flower.

Their breath of life departs and they are summoned to justice.
They die by thy decree, and are revived by thy mercy.
They acclaim thee, Eternal One! Thy glory is on them.

From the Martyr service:

Mourn, O my people, not yet bereft; their blood was shed for a worthless whim; they surrendered their lives to sanctify the name of G-d.

From the Book of Yonah

Then the Lord said: "You would spare the gourd, though you spent no work upon it, though you did not make it grow; it sprang up in a night and perished in a night. Should I not then spare the great city of Nineveh with more than a hundred and twenty thousand human beings, who do not know their right hand from their left, and much cattle?"

In our times, how many of us truly know our right hand from our left regarding Judaism, closeness to Hashem and spiritual goals? I plan to say the Asher Aimoten to plead with Hashem to spare us, that no harm befall us.

And may this prayer be a connection to our ancestors and to Jewish history starting with Avraham Aveinu, and to our forefathers to whom Hashem promised that we would be redeemed. May we be saved even if we have no merits, and may the Geulah Shelama come to reveal His Glory to all the world, with no harm to any Jew, nullifying all false prophets and idols.