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Then Shall Your Light  
Shine in the Darkness

By Daphne Lazar-Price

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*THIS EDITION OF SHEMA BEKOLAH IS DEDICATED IN HONOR OF RABBI MARIANNE NOVAK ON THE  
OCCASION OF HER RECEIVING SEMICHA FROM YESHIVAT MAHARAT.*

*BY HER PROUD FAMILY, NOAM STADLAN, ZEHAVYA, BATSHEVA (Z'L), AND HILLEL.*

# Then Shall Your Light Shine in the Darkness

By Daphne Lazar-Price<sup>1</sup>

Jewish life is replete with halakhic obligations and rituals that serve both the individual and the community and are conducted both in private and in public. How do these two realms relate to one another? Being a part of a community is an important value, as is recognizing and finding ways to support the marginalized among us. This is evident from the *birkhot haShahar*, the morning blessings, when we express gratitude for God's benevolence in helping the blind to see, enabling the feeble to walk, providing clothing for the poor, and freeing those in captivity.

Throughout our calendar year, there are moments when we step out of the mundane and into more holy and heady days. In preparation for the *Yamim Nora'im*, the High Holidays, at the start of the month of Elul, it is customary to blow the shofar at the end of *Shaharit*, the morning services, sounding out the *tekiah*, *shevarim*, *teruah*, and *tekiah/teruah gedolah* calls. The cry of the shofar is jarring, haunting. The prophet Amos asks, "Can a shofar be blown in the city and the people not tremble?"

The *Aseret Yemei Teshuva* mark the Ten Days of Repentance that start with Rosh Hashana and culminate with Yom Kippur, when we shift our focus toward self-awareness asking for and offering forgiveness to one another in an effort to achieve true repentance. It is traditional to increase Torah learning and to mindfully modify our behaviors as a nod toward the gravity of Yom Kippur.

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The liturgy and practices on Yom Kippur are intended to intensify our own personal connection to the day. In contrast to a typical day, Shabbat, or Yom Tov, we refrain from eating and drinking, wearing leather shoes, bathing, applying lotions, and having marital relations. The prayer services are filled with references to worship at the *mishkan* (sanctuary), and several times throughout the day we stand, heads bowed, reciting the *al het* ("for our sins") prayers of atonement as we beat on our hearts. It is a serious day; a constant reminder that our individual fates are inscribed on Rosh Hashana, and then sealed on Yom Kippur. We have no choice but to be introspective.

On Yom Kippur morning, our Torah reading focuses exclusively on ritual behavior—specifically, the prescribed worship on Yom Kippur in the *mishkan* (Leviticus 16:1—34). Traditionally, the haftarah readings are thematically related to the Torah reading; but the Yom Kippur haftarah, surprisingly, seems to contradict the Torah reading almost entirely—pronouncing ritual to be meaningless in the eyes of God. These passages serve as a reminder—almost a rebuke—not to separate ritual practice from realities dictated by social and moral considerations. The haftarah reminds us of the human condition.

הוּ לְרִיב וּמִצָּה תִצְוֶמוּ וְלִהְיוֹת בְּאֵזְרֵי רְשָׁע לֹא תִצְוֶמוּ  
כִּי־וּם לְהִשְׁמִיעַ בְּמָרוֹם קוֹלְכֶם:

הַכִּזָּה יִהְיֶה צֹם אֲבַחְתֶּהוּ יוֹם עֲנוּת אָדָם נִפְשׁוֹ הַלְכֹף  
כְּאִמּוֹן רֹאשׁוֹ וְשָׁק וְאִפְרִי יִצְיַע הַלְזָה תִקְרָא צוֹם וַיּוֹם  
רָצוֹן לִיהִנֶּה:

הַלֹּא זֶה צוֹם אֲבַחְתֶּהוּ פִתְלֵ חֲרָצְבוֹת לְשַׁע הַתָּר  
אֲגַדּוֹת מוֹטָה וְשִׁלַּח רְצוּצִים חֲפָשִׁים וְכִלְמוֹטָה  
תִּנְתַּקוּ:

הַלֹּא פָּרַס לְרַעֲב לְחֻמָּה וְעֵנִיִּים מְרוּדִים תִּבְיֵא בַּיִת כִּי  
תִרְאֶה עָרִם וְכִסְיֹתוֹ וּמִבְשָׂרָה לֹא תִתְעַלֵּם:

אִי יִבְקַע פֶּשֶׁחַר אֹרֶךְ וְאֶרְכָּתָהּ מִהֲרָה תִצְמַח וְהַלֵּךְ

לְפָנֶיךָ צְדִיקָה כְּבוֹד יְהוָה יִסְפָּד:  
אִז תִּקְרָא נִיהַנָּה יַעֲזֶה תִשְׁנֶע וַיֹּאמֶר הֲנִנִי אִם־תִּסְרִיר  
מִתּוֹכָהּ מוֹטֵה שְׁלַח אֶצְבֵּעַ וְדַבֵּר־אֲנִי:  
וְתִפֶּק לְרַעֲבֵי נַפְשֶׁךָ וְנִפְשׁ נַעֲנֶה תִשְׁבִּיעַ וְזָרַח בַּחֲשֵׁךְ  
אוֹרְךָ וְנִאֲפֵלְתֶךָ כְּצַהֲרִים:  
וְנָחַךְ יְהוָה תִּמְיִד וְהִשְׁבִּיעַ בְּצַחְצוּחוֹת נַפְשֶׁךָ וְעֲצַמּוֹתֶיךָ  
יַחֲלִיץ וְהִלִּיתְךָ כְּגֹן רְוָה וְכִמּוֹצָא מַיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִכָּזֵבוּ  
מִיָּמִי:

Because you fast in strife and contention, And  
you strike with a wicked fist! Your fasting today  
is not such as to make your voice heard on high.

Is such the fast I desire, a day for men to starve  
their bodies? Is it bowing the head like a bulrush  
and lying in sackcloth and ashes? Do you call that  
a fast, a day when the Eternal is favorable?

No, this is the fast I desire: To unlock fetters of  
wickedness, and untie the cords of the yoke to let  
the oppressed go free; to break off every yoke.

It is to share your bread with the hungry, and to  
take the wretched poor into your home; when you  
see the naked, to clothe him, and not to ignore  
your own kin.

Then shall your light burst through like the  
dawn and your healing spring up quickly; Your  
Vindicator shall march before you, the Presence  
of the Eternal shall be your rear guard.

Then, when you call, the Eternal will answer;  
when you cry, He will say: Here I am. If you  
banish the yoke from your midst, the menacing  
hand, and evil speech.

And you offer your compassion to the hungry And  
satisfy the famished creature—Then shall your  
light shine in darkness, and your gloom shall be  
like noonday.

The Eternal will guide you always; He will slake  
your thirst in parched places and give strength to  
your bones. You shall be like a watered garden,  
like a spring whose waters do not fail.

(Isaiah 58:4—11)

The haftarah is a proclamation that ritual practice and moral behavior must exist hand-in-hand. The reading serves as a blueprint that maps out the requirements to complete our atonement, insisting that it cannot be achieved by merely fasting and participating in prayer. No matter how hard we concentrate on the words, beat our chests or prostrate ourselves, our davening must include an intentionality regarding how we treat others—especially those less fortunate—and how we conduct ourselves in the world.

The purpose of Yom Kippur is to complete the atonement of our sins. But we must not allow ourselves to be satisfied with merely showing up at services, fasting, and chanting the prayers as we pass the hours of this awesome holiday. We must not lull ourselves into thinking that this intense focus on ourselves is somehow the preferred way to be—nor should it serve to exclude those around us. Indeed, disregarding others leads to a fundamentally flawed way of relating to God. Once the day is over, we should hold the words of Isaiah’s admonition in our hearts and endeavor to never hide behind personal ritual and communal responsibilities. Rather, we can lean on our Jewish values—those very ones that we include in our daily prayers in the *birkhot haShachar* year-round—and let them serve as a guide for each of us, toward building a better world—for ourselves, our neighbors, and for the world around us.

Save the Date

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6:00<sup>PM</sup>

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