

A National Garment of Light: A Prayer for countenance

For Az Nashir: We Will Sing Again

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I.

אֲשָׁמִים אֲנַחְנוּ עַל אֲחִינוּ אֲשֶׁר רָאִינוּ צָרַת נַפְשׁוֹ בְּהִתְחַנְּנוּ אֵלֵינוּ וְלֹא שָׁמַעְנוּ

We are guilty for our brother whose anguish we saw, who pleaded with us as we failed to listen.

We saw him from afar, his clothing, not his essence.

We cast them together, identities consumed in the flames of our cognitive divisions.

Do not turn Your face from us as we turned ours.

אֲשָׁמִים אֲנַחְנוּ עַל אֲחִינוּ אֲשֶׁר רָאִינוּ צָרַת נַפְשׁוֹ בְּהִתְחַנְּנוּ אֵלֵינוּ וְלֹא שָׁמַעְנוּ

We are guilty for our brother whose anguish we saw, who pleaded with us as we failed to listen.

Silenced by apathy, numbed through boredom,

In the prison of single vision blinded by hubris that tore a hole in the fabric of our national quilt,

A patchwork of pain and pride, patience and perseverance, determination and diligence,
Sewn lovingly over centuries of longing for a land, a people, for the face of God to return its countenance.

A garment of light and color, stitched together in the passage of time with the gossamer thread of memories,

Bestowing dignity and nobility to the most denigrated of nations.

Under our watch, its edges frayed, its seams gave way to the sin of egocentricity,

To the sin of living in echo chambers, to the sin of objectifying subjects,

To the sin of weaponizing words, to the sin of exploiting God,

To the sin of idolizing leaders, to the sin of abrogating responsibility.

אֲשָׁמִים אֲנַחְנוּ עַל אֲחִינוּ שֶׁלֹא שָׁמַעְנוּ צַעֲקָתָם

We are guilty for our brother whose anguish we saw, who pleaded with us as we failed to listen.

We gnawed at the seams that weathered its delicate patchwork,

As we silenced the cries of the mother who protected her child with her body as rockets rained over her home in Sderot month after month.

As we denied the pain of those who felt democracy was in danger.

As we belittled the fear of those who felt the Jewish essence of the country was at risk.

The voice of moderation and compromise, of respect and sanctity,

Of deference and humility was lost in a cacophony of sanctimonious voices.

Because we are a stiff-necked people whose refusal to look sideways engenders truth rather than peace.

אשמים אנחנו על אחינו שלא שמענו צעקתם

We are guilty for our brother whose anguish we saw, who pleaded with us as we failed to listen.

II.

And now my heart seeks Your face, God.

לך אָמַר לְבִי בְּקִשׁוֹ פָּנֶי אֶת־פָּנֶיךָ ה' אֲבִיבִי

Do not hide Your face from me as I hid mine from You.

אַל־תַּסְתֵּר פָּנֶיךָ מִמֶּנִּי

Do not forsake or abandon me, God my savior, as we abandoned each other.

אַל־תִּטְשֵׁנִי וְאַל־תַּעֲזֹבֵנִי אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

III.

And then the seventh day was upon us,

And the earth was a void of chaos, and darkness swept over the face of the abyss,

And the spirit of God hovered on the face of the water.

הָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תֶּהוֹ וְכֹהוּ וְחָשֶׁךְ עַל־פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל־פְּנֵי הַמָּיִם

The illusion of order we had carefully calibrated was eclipsed by a thick cloud.

And then there was nothing... no sound, no noise, no saving God, no army, no leaders, no government.

Just an image of the abyss.

In place of the arbitrary divisions of 'us' and 'them,' we faced a division of 'light' and 'dark,' 'good' and 'evil.'

And the screams of those people whose faces we had obscured were etched for eternity on our national psyche.

Our brother's blood that called from the ground was no longer 'hefker.'

The threads that had rent were gathered and sewn as the impudence of Your stiff-necked people shone its audacious face.

And he drove from the north to the south, and he saved, again and again, until he fell.

The righteous women in whose merit we were redeemed from Egypt have returned:

the mother and the sister, the tank fighter, the daughter and the soldier and the *taspanit*.

The dancer at the Nova festival turned lioness in Gaza

In their merit, we will be redeemed.

We wait for no miracle, for the miracle already exists in the face of the other who is not in my image, who we saved and for whom we cry.

IV.

Ayeka they called, *Hineni* we responded.

In the *Hineni*, there was no right, no left, no wrong.

There was only right: the right to respond to the call, the right to run into the fire, the right to tear across the country and fight evil face to face.

V.

But You, God, where are You? *Ayeka?*

Did You see them drag a one-armed boy into a truck?

Did You watch as the young women, bloodied and soiled, disappeared underground?

Were You in the flames as entire families were burnt alive in their beds?

Is Your image burnt as their bodies were?

Will You, like Your people, respond *Hineni*?

Watch us closely, see our pain.

See the countless acts of courage and bravery of Your people.

And You are not in the wind, and You are not in the fire, and You are not in the earthquake.

You are in the still small voice, and we, Your people, are listening again to the still small voice, the voice of the Other not in my image.

Hear the cries of Your people and turn Your face towards us.

You who heard the cry of Moshe when he went out to his brethren and saw their suffering, answer the cries of Your children fighting their enemies on the battlefields.

(וַיִּצְאָ אֶל־אֶחָיו וַיֹּאמֶר בְּסִבְלָתָם)

You who heard the cry of Rachel who refused to be comforted in Ramah, give comfort to the mothers broken through unbearable loss.

You who heard the cry of Yosef in the pit, hear the terrified whispers of Your children silenced in the tunnels of Gaza.

נָדִי סִפְרָתְךָ אֶתָּה שְׂיִמָּה דְמַעְתִּי בְנֹאדְךָ הֲלֵא בְּסִפְרָתְךָ

Deposit our tears into Your flask, into Your book.

אֲזַ יָשׁוּבוּ אוֹיְבֵי אַחֲרֵי בְּיוֹם אֶקְרָא

And then let my enemies retreat when I call on You. (Tehillim 56)

VI.

And now, Hashem, walk with us in this valley of death, comfort us and allay our fears. Heal us in body and spirit.

Give us strength to weave this cataclysmic moment into the fabric of our national narrative.

A story of a stiff-necked people who have never let go of God, and a God who has never let go of His people.

הַשִּׁיבֵנוּ הָאֵל קִנְיָךְ וְנִשְׁעָה

Shine Your face upon us and save us. (Tehillim 30:20)

כִּי הִלֵּכִישְׁנִי בְּ

גְּדֵי־יִשְׁעַי חֲצִיל צִדְקָה יַעֲטֵנִי

Clothe us with garments of triumph, wrap us in a garment of victory. (Isaiah 61)

Create light from the darkness that envelops us because Your people have chosen life.

Remember us for life, You God Who desires life; inscribe us in the Book of Life, for Your sake, God of Life.