

KOL NIDRE 5770 SERMON BY RABBI ASHER LOPATIN

GMAR CHATIMA TOVA!

BARUCH HASHEM! FROM UP HERE ON THE BIMA I GET TO LOOK OUT AND SEE ANSHE SHOLOM IN ALL ITS GLORY. “BEROV AM HADRAT MELECH” – THE TRUE GLORY OF GOD THE KING COMES FROM THE GREATNESS OF THE PEOPLE AND THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE COMING TOGETHER TO BE IN GOD’S HOUSE.

BUT I’M ALSO AWARE AS I LOOK OUT ON ALL OF MY FELLOW DAVENERS THAT WE HAVE EXPERIMENTED WITH A HYBRID SEATING PLAN: A MIXTURE OF OPEN AND RESERVED SEATING. ANYONE WHO WANTS TO RESERVE A SEAT AHEAD OF TIME IS ABLE TO DO SO, BUT YOU DON’T HAVE TO. AND ABOUT HALF OF THE SEATS ARE RESERVED AND HALF ARE OPEN.

I DON’T WANT TO INQUIRE TONIGHT HOW MANY OF YOU RESERVED A SEAT AND ARE NOT SITTING IN IT, AND I REALLY DON’T WANT TO KNOW WHO DIDN’T RESERVE A SEAT AND IS SITTING IN SOMEONE ELSE’S RESERVED SEAT. AT ANSHE SHOLOM WE VALUE MAKING PEOPLE FEEL COMFORTABLE AND WELCOME – AND EVERYONE IN THIS ROOM, WHEREVER THEY ARE SEATED IS WELCOME AND BELOVED.

BUT NO ONE, THIS YEAR OR LAST, EVEN AS A JOKE, ASKED ME IF THERE WAS ANY PRAYER OR B’RACHA FOR GETTING A GOOD SEAT OR A GOOD NEIGHBOR. WHETHER YOU HAVE A RESERVED SEAT OR NOT, AND WHETHER YOU ARE AN SERIOUS DAVENER, AN OCCASIONAL TALKER, OR A SCHMOOZING ADDICT, ONE WOULD THINK YOU MIGHT WANT TO APPEAL TO THE ALMIGHTY TO BE SEATED NEXT TO THE APPROPRIATE PERSON. AND ACTUALLY, WHILE THERE IS NO B’RACHA FOR A GOOD NEIGHBOR, THERE IS A YEHI RATZON THAT MANY SAY EVERY DAY. IT’S RIGHT ON PAGE 63 OF THE BIRENBAUM:

YEHI RATZON... MILFANECHA... SHETATZILEINI HAYOM UVECHOL YOM ME’ADAM RA,
UMECHAVEIR RA UMISHACHEN RA

BUT THIS PRAYER IS IN THE SINGULAR. AND IT IS NOT AN OFFICIAL B’RACHA – IT DOESN’T START OR END WITH “BLESSED ART THOU GOD...” IT’S MORE LIKE A PRIVATE SUPPLICATION. THE OFFICIAL B’RACHA THAT PRECEDES IT TALKS ABOUT: “HARCHIKEINU ME’ADAM RA UMICHAVER RA...” – AS A SOCIETY, IN THE PLURAL, WE ASK GOD TO KEEP US AWAY FROM BAD PEOPLE, AND EVEN BAD FRIENDS... BUT NOT BAD NEIGHBORS – NOT FROM A SHACHEIN RA.

THIS IS BECAUSE JUDAISM BELIEVES THAT IF YOU ARE IN A JEWISH COMMUNAL STRUCTURE – ESPECIALLY A HOLY COMMUNITY SUCH AS A SHUL –THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A BAD NEIGHBOR. ANYONE YOU ARE SITTING NEXT TO WHEN YOU ARE IN SHUL, HAS THE POTENTIAL TO INSPIRE YOU TO BE A BETTER JEW – TO BE A BETTER DAVENER, TO DO T’SHUVA BETTER, TO MAKE YOU MORE EXCITED ABOUT TORAH AND OUR TRADITION. IF THEY ARE IN SHUL, THEY ARE GOOD NEIGHBORS.

YES, YOU MAY HAVE TO SAY TO THE PERSON SITTING NEXT TO YOU WHO WANTS TO SCHMOOZE WITH YOU, “LET’S CONTINUE THIS CONVERSATION AFTER SHUL...” BUT IF THAT PERSON IS IN SHUL, THEY ARE A “SHACHEIN TOV.”

AND I HOPE THAT OUR SHUL IS ONE WHERE WHOEVER COMES IN NOT ONLY FEELS WELCOME AND NOT JUDGED, BUT ALSO FEELS THAT THEY CAN SIT ANYWHERE AND THE PERSON NEXT TO THEM, THOUGH DIFFERENT IN PERHAPS MANY WAYS, WILL BE A NEIGHBOR WHOM THEY CAN TRUST, A NEIGHBOR WHO WILL REACH OUT TO THEM, A NEIGHBOR WHO ELEVATES THEM IN SOME WAY.

LISTEN TO THE RAMBAM : READ QUOTE

ONLY SOMEONE WHO STAYS AWAY – WHO REJECTS THE COMMUNITY – IS A BAD NEIGHBOR, A “SHACHEIN RA”; IF YOU ARE HERE YOU MAY BE A SINNER, BUT YOU ARE BY DEFINITION A GOOD NEIGHBOR, A “SHACHEIN TOV”.

ANSHE SHOLOM GETS ITS STRENGTH AND VIBRANCY FROM ALL THE SHECHEINIM TOVIM, THE GOOD NEIGHBORS, WHO COME HERE: YES, WE HAVE TALKERS AND SCHMOOZERS AND LOUD DAVENERS AND SOFT DAVENERS AND THOSE THAT SHAKE AND THOSE THAT MUMBLE, THOSE THAT COME TO FIND A COMMUNITY AND THOSE THAT COME TO FIND GOD. SOME COME BECAUSE OF THEIR PARENTS, SOME COME DESPITE THEIR PARENTS, EVERYONE COMES BECAUSE THEY CHOOSE TO COME. A DIVERSE GROUP, AND EVERYONE HAS THEIR OWN PATH AND THEIR OWN CONNECTION TO GOD – AND SOMETIMES THEIR OWN DEFINITION OF GOD. SOME ARE ON THE RIGHT ON ISRAEL, SOME ARE ON THE LEFT ON ISRAEL AND SOME HAVE THEIR OWN DEFINITION OF ZIONISM. BUT WE ARE ALL GOOD NEIGHBORS, WE ARE ALL COMING TOGETHER INTO THIS BEIT HAKNESSET AND NO ONE HERE, WHETHER YOU ARE SITTING NEXT TO THEM OR FAR AWAY FROM THEM IS A “BAD NEIGHBOR. AND WHETHER YOU COME EVERY DAY, OR TWICE A DAY AS I HOPE MORE AND MORE WILL – OR ONCE A YEAR – WE NEED YOU AT ANSHE SHOLOM – YOU ARE CONTRIBUTING YOURSELF TO OUR COMMUNITY.

SO TONIGHT, ON YOM KIPPUR, AS OUR BOARD CHAIRMAN ADAM LEVINE SPEAKS TO YOU ABOUT THE YOM KIPPUR APPEAL, I HOPE THAT WE NOT ONLY THINK ABOUT BEING PART OF THE SHUL, A HOLY INSTITUTION THAT WE CARE ABOUT AND WANT TO FLOURISH, BUT ALSO THAT WE CAN TURN THE YOM KIPPUR APPEAL INTO A STATEMENT ABOUT OURSELVES: THAT WE OURSELVES UNDERSTAND THAT WE ARE GOOD NEIGHBORS, THAT WE THINK ABOUT WHY WE HAVE CHOSEN TO COME HERE TONIGHT, WHY HAVE WE MADE THE CHOICE TO CONNECT WITH EVERYONE AROUND US. THE RAMBAM AND OUR RABBIS HAVE CONFIDENCE IN US THAT WE ARE GOOD NEIGHBORS; NOW IT’S TIME FOR US TO HAVE CONFIDENCE IN OURSELVES, THAT WE ARE A CRITICAL PART OF ANSHE SHOLOM AND THE JEWISH PEOPLE, THAT WE ARE “SHECHEINIM TOVIM” THE GOOD NEIGHBORS WHO HAVE SOMETHING TO CONTRIBUTE AND THAT ANSHE SHOLOM, THIS SYNAGOGUE RIGHT HERE, REALLY NEEDS US. AND IF WE REALIZE HOW MUCH OF A ROLE WE PLAY AS GOOD NEIGHBORS IN OUR SHUL AND OUR COMMUNITY, THEN WE CAN BE CONFIDENT THAT GOD WILL SEE THAT AS WELL, AND WILL BLESS US WITH A SWEET NEW YEAR, A YEAR OF GROWTH AND A YEAR OF BEING THE GOOD NEIGHBORS THAT OUR TRADITION KNOWS WE CAN BE.

