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Dear Chaveirim,

I believe that today Klal Yisrael has finally exhaled after holding our collective breath for two years. No doubt, the decision made by the government of Israel has its supporters and critics, in light of the price that is being paid and may yet still be paid for the hostages' return. We are all in positions of leadership and can appreciate the second guessing that may attend our own important decisions that likely have had more limited impact on the fate of K'lal Yisrael.

Thus, along with Acheinu Beis Yisrael in Eretz Yisrael, we celebrate so much, including but not limited to the return of the chatufim, the ability of our chayalim and their families to reunite, and the healing and rebuilding of families and communities. We also pray that Hashem bless Am Yisrael with happiness, health, peace, vitality, life and flourishing in this new year.

I often remind my balebatim, that absent our ability to directly shape the political or security policy of the State of Israel, the question we must ask ourselves is what can I actually do?

Here I am reminded of the beautiful teaching of the Holy Ruziner and so many Chasidic Masters on the Midrash, 'קשה עלי פרידתכם'. Hashem does not lament קשה פרידתנו - the impending separation between Jews and Hashem as we depart the intimacy of the yamim nora'im we shared together; rather, He looks at the nation and laments on פרידתכם - you separation from each other. It is the fissures, large and small, in the body of our people that is difficult for the Ribono Shel Olam. Thus, the Avodah of Shemini Atzeres/Simchas Torah is to tend to the open wounds and repair the rifts that exist among K'lal Yisrael.

We all remember the battle lines that were drawn and pulling us apart at the seams just prior to the massacre two years ago, and we may also remember the extraordinary achdus that enveloped our people in the weeks and months that followed.

Perhaps, it is a Divine message that tragedy struck and hostages were abducted on the day of קשה פרידתכם, and they are now being returned on the eve of קשה עלי

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פרידתכם. As Hashem bestows this gift on our people, we are reminded of the Avodah that is directly within our power to effect - connection and unity - a חיבור to heal the פירוד, each of us within our proverbial dalet amos.

This word חיבור, constructed as a verb, finds expression in the Torah almost exclusively around constructing the Mishkan, a place meant to unite k'lal yisrael. The Mishkan construction, according to the Vilna Gaon, began on the first day of Sukkos, and of course the Beis Hamikdash - the edifice meant to unite Klal Yisrael - was inaugurated by Shlomo Hamelech during Sukkos.

To paraphrase The Rav zt"l's response to the suffering of churban, ours is not to ask why but to ask what can I now do ?

Perhaps, Rav Amital's reflections in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War are quite relevant at this moment.

- 1) **Teshuva:** What is demanded is **our own repentance; not that of others**. Clearly, that all depends on us, and us alone.
- 2) **Hakaras HaTov:** Rambam says that we cry out and sound the trumpets and fast, and when salvation arrives and the rains fall, we recite Hallel in praise and thanksgiving to God. We need to know that there was an exceptionally great salvation here, despite the tremendous sacrifices and pain. And we are obligated to give thanks.

May Hashem provide us the capacity to internalize these aspirations and the tools to inspire our congregants, our students, and ourselves.

Chag Sameach.



Etan Tokayer
President