



## Remembering and Forgetting: The High Holidays as a Time of Solidarity

**Elana Stein Hain**

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1. **R. Natan Sternhartz of Nemirov (Nemyriv, Ukraine, 18<sup>th</sup> c.), *Likkutei Tefillot*, 346**

רבוננו של עולם...ואני צריך כל ימי חיי...לחפש ולבקש בכל כחי אחר אבדתי שאבדתי וששכחתי...ונשכח ונאבד ממני כל טוב נשמתי כל טוב הנצחי כל טוב האמתי ואיני יודע שום דרך איך לבקש ולחפש אחר אבדתי אבדותי הרבות מאד מאד אשר כמעט כמעט אבדתי את עצמי לגמרי חס ושלום...יודע תעלומות עד אין חקר צופה נסתרות צופה ומביט עד סוף כל הדורות אתה לבד יודע כל אבדותי הרבים היכן הם...

Sovereign of the universe...my whole life I must...search with all my might to find what I have lost and forgotten...And all the good of my soul, all eternal, all true good have been forgotten by me and lost to me. And I do not know any way to request and search for my loss, my many, many losses, whereby I almost, almost lost myself completely, God forbid...The One Who knows the hidden, Who sees to the end of generations, only You know where my many losses are...

2. **Dr. Mira Balberg, *Fractured Tablets: Forgetfulness and Fallibility in Late Ancient Rabbinic Culture*, 1–6 (excerpts)**

Moses's last speech to his people, which constitutes the biblical book of Deuteronomy, is riddled with apprehension about forgetfulness. While the entire speech is a reactivation of memory—insofar as it is a retelling of Israel's collective past and a reiteration of the law—and an exhortation on the importance of memory, Moses expresses very little faith in the Israelites' ability to remember God's wonders and benevolence in the long run... Moses's Israelites are like Odysseus's Lotus-Eaters: they eat and immediately forget where they came from and what they ought to do.

Moreover, in Deuteronomy, memory and forgetfulness are an all-or-nothing game. Remembering God and the Israelites' sacred history—particularly the enslavement and liberation in Egypt—are the precondition for following and observing any of God's commandments and laws. Accordingly, forgetfulness necessarily and inevitably means abandonment and violation of all of God's laws. There is no partial, passing, or excusable forgetfulness of specific ordinances: only total and all-encompassing forgetfulness, which demonstrates ingratitude and sinfulness, and portends punishment.

While the rabbis share with their predecessors the fundamental view of human memory as flawed and unreliable, their engagement with the ever-present prospect of forgetfulness is entirely different from what we find in the Hebrew Bible and in Second Temple literature. The forgetfulness they are concerned with is not all-encompassing but highly specific, not permanent but temporary, and most important, not a sign of abandonment of God and his commandments but an acceptable, predictable, and rectifiable part of life in accordance with the Torah.

### 3. Babylonian Talmud Rosh Hashanah 32b

אין מזכירין זכרון של יחיד, ואפילו לטובה, כגון: "זכרני ה' ברצון עמך", וכגון: "זכרה לי א-להי לטובה".

The Gemara states: One does not recite a verse dealing with the remembrance of an individual, even if it is for good, for example: "Remember me, O Lord, when You show favor to Your people" (Psalms 106:4), and, for example: "Remember me, my God, for good" (Nehemiah 5:19).

פקדונות — הרי הן כזכרונות, כגון: "וה' פקד את שרה", וכגון: "פקוד פקדתי אתכם", דברי רבי יוסי. רבי יהודה אומר: אינן כזכרונות.

Verses that mention God's revisitings [*pikdonot*] are equivalent to verses of remembrances [*zikhronot*], and therefore they may be counted in the ten verses. For example: "And the Lord revisited [*pakad*] Sarah" (Genesis 21:1), and, for example: "I have surely revisited [*pakadeti*] you" (Exodus 3:16). This is the statement of Rabbi Yosei. Rabbi Yehuda says: They are not equivalent to verses of remembrances.

ולרבי יוסי נהי נמי דפקדונות הרי הן כזכרונות, "וה' פקד את שרה" — פקדון דיחיד הוא! כיון דאתו רבים מינה — כרבים דמיא.

The Gemara asks: And according to the opinion of Rabbi Yosei, although verses that speak of God revisiting man are equivalent to verses of remembrances, he cites the following verse as an example: "And the Lord revisited Sarah," which is a revisiting of an individual. Despite the fact that it was stated above that a remembrance must refer to the collective, since many descendants came from her, as Sarah is the mother of the Jewish people, she is considered like many. Therefore, this verse is effectively dealing with the remembrance of the entire Jewish people.

### 4. Musaf Prayer for Rosh HaShanah, *Zikhronot*/Remembrances

God remembers the bad that we do...

אתה זוכר מעשה עולם ופוקד כל יצורי קדם. לפניך נגלו כל תעלומות והמון נסתרות שמבראשית... כי אין שכחה לפני כסא כבודך... כי זכר כל היצור לפניך בא. מעשה איש ופקדתו. ועלילות מצעדי גבר. מחשבות אדם ותחבולותיו ויצרי מעללי איש: אשרי איש שלא ישכחך. וכן אדם ותאמץ בדך. כי דורשיך לעולם לא יכשלו. ולא יכלמו לגצח כל החוסים בדך: כי זכר כל המעשים לפניך בא ואתה דורש מעשה כלם:

**You** remember the dealings of the world, and You [also] consider the behavior of all those who lived in earlier times... for there is no forgetfulness before the throne of Your Glory... For the remembrance of all that is formed comes before You: the dealings of each person, and the decree of their fate, and the misdeeds of a person's actions, the thoughts of a person and their schemes, and the motives for the deeds of a person. Fortunate is the person who does not forget You, the

person who gains strength in You. For those who seek You will never stumble, and never will they be disgraced— all who trust in You. For the remembrance of all their deeds come before You, and You examine the deeds of all of them.

**God honors (“remembers”) a commitment to save...**

וְגַם אֶת נֶחֱ אֶת לַח בְּאַהֲבָה זָכְרָתָּ. וַתִּפְקְדֵהוּ בַדְּבָר יְשׁוּעָה וְרַחֲמִים בְּהִבְיָאֵךְ אֶת מִי הַמְּבֹוֹל לְשַׁחַת כָּל בָּשָׂר מִפְּנֵי רָע מַעַלְלֵיהֶם. עַל כֵּן זָכְרוֹנוֹ בָּא לְפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ לְהַרְבּוֹת זְרָעוֹ כְּעֶפְרוֹת תִּבְּל. וַיַּצְאֵצְאוּ כְּחוֹל הַיָּם. כְּכַתּוּב בְּתוֹרָתְךָ וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱ-לֹהִים אֶת נֶחֱ וְאֶת כָּל הַחַיָּה וְאֶת כָּל הַבְּהֵמָה אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ בַּתֵּבָה וַיַּעֲבֵר אֱ-לֹהִים רוּחַ עַל הָאָרֶץ וַיִּשְׁכּוּ הַמַּיִם : וַנֹּאמֶר וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱ-לֹהִים אֶת נִאֲקָתָם וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱ-לֹהִים אֶת בְּרִיתוֹ אֶת אַבְרָהָם אֶת יִצְחָק וְאֶת יַעֲקֹב : וַנֹּאמֶר וַזְכֹּרְתִי אֶת בְּרִיתִי יַעֲקֹב וְאֶת-בְּרִיתִי יִצְחָק וְאֶת אַבְרָהָם אֶת בְּרִיתִי אֶזְכֹּר וְהָאָרֶץ אֶזְכֹּר ...:

**And No'ach too,** You remembered with love, and [therefore] decreed for him a promise of deliverance and compassion, when You brought the flood-waters to destroy all flesh because of the wickedness of their deeds. Therefore, his remembrance came before You, Lord, our God, to multiply his seed like the dust of the earth, and his descendants as the sand of the sea; as it is written in Your Torah; “And God remembered No’ach and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the Ark, and God caused a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters were calmed.” And it is said: “And God heard their groaning cry, and God remembered God’s covenant with Avraham, with Yitzchak, and with Yaakov.” And it is said: “I will remember My covenant with Yaakov, and also My covenant with Yitzchak, and also My covenant with Avraham, will I remember; and the land [of Yisrael] I will remember.”...

**God remembers earlier, better times...**

וְעַל יְדֵי עֲבָדֶיךָ הַנְּבִיאִים כְּתוּב לֵאמֹר : הַלֵּךְ וְקִרְאתָ בְּאָזְנֵי יְרוּשָׁלַם לֵאמֹר כֹּה אָמַר יְ-הוָה זָכְרָתִי לָךְ חֶסֶד נְעוּרַיִךְ אֲהַבֵּת כְּלוּלְתֵיךְ לְכַתֵּב אַחֲרַי בַּמִּדְבָּר בְּאָרֶץ לֹא זְרוּעָה : וַנֹּאמֶר וַזְכֹּרְתִי אֲנִי אֶת בְּרִיתִי אוֹתְךָ בִּימֵי נְעוּרַיִךְ וְהַקִּימוֹתִי לָךְ בְּרִית עוֹלָם : וַנֹּאמֶר הֲבֵן יָקִיר לִי אֶפְרַיִם אִם יֶלֶד שְׁעִשׂוּעִים כִּי מִדֵּי דְבָרֵי בּוֹ זָכַר אֶזְכְּרֶנּוּ עוֹד עַל כֵּן הָמוּ מְעִי לוֹ רַחֵם אֶרְחַמְנוּ נָאִם ה' :

**And** by the hand of Your servants, the Prophets it is written: “Go and proclaim it in the ears of Yerushalayim, saying: thus said the Lord, I remembered for you the kindness of your youth, the love of your bridal days, how you followed Me into the wilderness, in a land that was not cultivated.” And it is said: “I will remember My covenant [which I made] with you in the days of your youth, and I will fulfill it for you as an everlasting covenant.” And it is said: “Is Ephraim not My precious son, is he not a child of delight? For whenever I speak of him, I recall him even more; Therefore, My innermost being is aroused for him, I will surely have compassion on him, says the Lord.”

**Asking God to remember only the good, only the covenant, to remember our sacrifice, and to remember all who have been forgotten.**

אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ וְאֱ-לֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ זְכוּרֵנוּ בְּזִכְרוֹן טוֹב לְפָנֶיךָ וּפְקֻדָּנוּ בְּפִקְדוֹת יְשׁוּעָה וְרַחֲמִים מִשָּׁמַי שְׁמִי קָדָם וְזָכַר לָנוּ ה' אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ אֶת הַבְּרִית וְאֶת הַחֶסֶד וְאֶת-הַשְּׁבוּעָה אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ לְאַבְרָהָם אֲבִינוּ בְּהַר הַמּוֹרִיָּה וְתִרְאֶה לְפָנֶיךָ עֲקֵדָה שְׁעָקֵד אַבְרָהָם אֲבִינוּ אֶת יְצַחָק בְּנוֹ עַל גְּבֵי הַמְּזֻבַּח וְכַבֵּשׁ רַחֲמָיו לַעֲשׂוֹת רְצוֹנְךָ בְּלִבָּב שָׁלֵם כִּי יְכַבְּשׁוּ רַחֲמֶיךָ אֶת פְּעֻסְךָ מֵעַלְיָנוּ וּבְטוֹבְךָ הַגְּדוֹל יָשׁוּב חֲרוֹן אַפֶּךָ מֵעַמְּךָ וּמֵעִירְךָ וּמֵאֶרְצְךָ וּמִנְחֻלְתְּךָ. וְקִיָּם לָנוּ ה' אֱ-לֹהֵינוּ אֶת הַדָּבָר שֶׁהִבְטַחְתָּנוּ בְּתוֹרָתְךָ עַל יְדֵי מֹשֶׁה עֲבָדְךָ מִפִּי כְּבוֹדְךָ כְּאָמֹר: וְזָכַרְתִּי לָהֶם בְּרִית רַאשֻׁנִים אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִי אוֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְעֵינֵי הַגּוֹיִם לְהִיּוֹת לָהֶם לֹא-לֵהִים אֲנִי ה': כִּי זָכַר כָּל הַנְּשִׁכָּחוֹת אֶתְּךָ הוּא מַעֲוֹלָם וְאִין שִׁכְחָה לְפָנֶיךָ כִּסֵּא כְבוֹדְךָ. וְעֲקֻדַת יְצַחָק לְזִרְעוֹ (שָׁל יַעֲקֹב) הַיּוֹם בְּרַחֲמִים תִּזְכּוֹר: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' זָכַר הַבְּרִית:

**Our God** and God of our ancestors remember us favorably before You and be mindful of us for deliverance and compassion from the eternal high heavens. Remember in our behalf, Lord, our God, the covenant, the kindness and the oath which You swore to our father Avraham on Mount Moriah, and let there appear before You the binding with which our father Avraham bound his son Yitzchak upon the altar, and how he suppressed his compassion to do Your will with a whole heart; so may Your compassion suppress Your anger against us, and in Your great goodness turn Your fierce anger away from Your people, and from Your city, from Your land, and from Your territorial heritage. And fulfill for us Lord, our God the promise You made in Your Torah, through Your servant, Moshe, from the mouth of Your glory, as it is said: "I will remember for them the covenant with their ancestors whom I took out of the land of Mitzrayim, before the eyes of the nations, to be their God; I am the Lord." For the One Who remembers all forgotten things from eternity, are You, and there is no forgetfulness before the Throne of Your Glory; and the binding of Yitzchak— on behalf of his descendants— may You remember it today with compassion. Blessed are You Lord, Who remembers the covenant.

**5. R. Eliyahu Ki Tov (Mokotovsky, 20<sup>th</sup> c.), Sefer Ha-Toda'ah/The Book of Jewish Awareness**

**זוכר את כל הנשכחות**

**Who remembers all that is forgotten.**

מדתו של הקב"ה שאת הנשכחות לאדם הוא זוכר אבל הנזכרות לאדם אינו זוכר:

God's way is that God remembers what is forgotten by human beings, but what is remembered by human beings God does "not" remember.

כיצד? הרי שעבר אדם עברה ושוכחה ולא שב עליה בתשובה הקב"ה זוכרה ומביא את האדם בדין עליה.

How so? If a person transgresses and forgets about it, and does not repent over it, God remembers it and brings a person to justice over it.

עבר עברה וזוכרה תמיד כמו שאמר דוד "וחטאתי נגדי תמיד" – הקב"ה אינו זוכרה שהרי אינה מן הנשכחות.

If one transgressed and always remembers it, as David said “I am ever conscious of my sin (Psalms 51:5),” God does “not” remember it, for it is not among that which has been forgotten.

הרי שעשה אדם מצוה וזוכרה תמיד ומתגאה בה – הקב"ה אינו זוכרה שהרי שונא ה' כל גבה לב.

If someone performed a *mitzvah* and remembers it always and is arrogant about it – God does not remember it, for God hates all who are haughty (see Proverbs 16:5).

עשה מצוה ושכחה והרי הוא בעיניו כאילו לא עשה כלום – הקב"ה זוכרה תמיד וטומנה אצלו ומשלם לעושה כגמולו הטוב.

If someone performed a *mitzvah* and forgot about it, and it is as though they did nothing (i.e., the person is humbled about it) – God remembers it always and rewards the person for doing good.

## 6. Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 49:15

15 Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should not have compassion on the child of her womb? Yes, these may forget, yet will not I forget you.  
טו הַתְּשִׁיכַח אִשָּׁה עוֹלָהּ, מֵרַחֵם בֶּן-בֵּטֶן; גַּם-אֵלֶּה תִשְׁכַּחְנָה, וְאַנְכִי לֹא אֶשְׁכַּחְךָ.

## 7. Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 32b (on the verse in Isaiah)

”הַתְּשִׁיכַח אִשָּׁה עוֹלָהּ”, אָמַר הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא: כָּלֹּם אֶשְׁכַּח עוֹלוֹת אֵילִים וּפְטָרֵי רְחֻמִּים שֶׁהַקָּרָבָת לִפְנֵי בַּמִּדְבָּר! אָמְרָה לִפְנֵי: רַבּוֹנוּ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, הוֹאִיל וְאַיִן שְׂכַחָה לִפְנֵי כִּסֵּא כְבוֹדְךָ, שָׂמָא לֹא תִשְׁכַּח לִי מַעֲשֵׂה הָעֵגֶל? אָמַר לָהּ: ”גַּם אֵלֶּה תִשְׁכַּחְנָה”.

Can a woman forget her nursing child?: God said – Would I ever forget the ram offerings or the firstborn animals that you offered before Me in the wilderness?! Israel said before God: Master of the universe, if You do not forget, perhaps You will not forget *for me* the sin of the golden calf? God responded: I shall forget these too.

אָמְרָה לִפְנֵי: רַבּוֹנוּ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, הוֹאִיל וְיֵשׁ שְׂכַחָה לִפְנֵי כִּסֵּא כְבוֹדְךָ, שָׂמָא תִשְׁכַּח לִי מַעֲשֵׂה סִינַי? אָמַר לָהּ: ”וְאַנְכִי לֹא אֶשְׁכַּחְךָ”.

Israel said before God: Master of the universe, if You do forget, perhaps you will forget *for me* the revelation at Sinai? God responded: And I will not forget you.

וְהִזְיֵנוּ דְאָמַר רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר אָמַר רַב אוֹשְׁעֲיָא: מַאי דְכָתִיב ”גַּם אֵלֶּה תִשְׁכַּחְנָה” — זֶה מַעֲשֵׂה הָעֵגֶל, ”וְאַנְכִי לֹא אֶשְׁכַּחְךָ” — זֶה מַעֲשֵׂה סִינַי.

The Gemara notes: That is what Rabbi Elazar said that Rav Oshaya said: What is the meaning of that which is written: “These too will be forgotten”? That is the sin of the Golden Calf. And what is the meaning of I will not forget you? Those are the events that transpired at Sinai.