

# נוֹרָא עֲלֵילָה עַל בְּנֵי אָדָם

## The 402 Bus driver<sup>1</sup> and



*Piyyut (liturgical poem) that begins the Ne'ilah service at the conclusion of Yom Kippur.<sup>2</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> e.mail: [otzarot@bezeqint.net](mailto:otzarot@bezeqint.net) • [www.otzarot.com](http://www.otzarot.com) • Printed in Israel.

<sup>2</sup> The initial letters of the first six stanzas of the piyyut spell out משה חזק, "Moses, may he be strong", in reference to the piyyut's author Moses ibn Ezra (12th century Spain).

**I read the following article in shul that captured my imagination. The story was read as a mussar tale with the following preamble:**

Regarding developing good character, too, certain negative traits need to be rooted out first, and there are certain positive traits that are first ones that we need to try to perfect. And even if we are working hard to root out the negative and develop the positive, we should never pat ourselves on the back and think that we deserve the progress that we are making. We must realize that the proper perspective that we have is a gift from HaShem, and as we climb the spiritual ladder, it is with His help.

*This was followed by the maaser, the story of the Egged 402 from Bnei Brak to Yerushalayim...*

*I was struck by the depth of the story, the human emotions it evoked in me, the raw feelings of desperation waiting for the bus as the Sabbath approached and the dawning of realization that these people might be stuck on the road or return to homes without food etc...*

*Then the reversal in the narrative as the driver admits he was the 402 all along but feared the wrath of the horde waiting at the bus stop, wishing their blessings not their curses he employs the ruse.*

*Here is the text from the children's page:*

Last year, on the *motzei* Shabbos just before Rosh HaShana, the buses out of Bnei Brak to Jerusalem were packed with passengers. The 400 and 402 would wind their way through Bnei Brak, and at the edge of the city – at the last stop before the buses go onto the highway to Jerusalem, some sixty *Yehudim* stood and waited for over two hours, but each 400 or 402 that appeared just whizzed by them because there were no seats and people were standing in the aisle! It happened over and over again and tempers quickly grew short. Now it was one-thirty in the morning. For half an hour not one bus had come. Understandably, the *Yehudim* at the stop were frustrated, worried and very upset at the bus company.

Suddenly a bus came and pulled up at the stop -- number 318 bound for Rechovot. The bus was empty. The driver opened the door and asked, "What are you waiting for at one-thirty in the morning?" They explained to him they were stranded there and asked him to change his number to 402 and take them to Jerusalem.

He apologized, saying he couldn't that, and explained that if he did as they asked he almost certainly would lose his job. The stranded *Yehudim*, though, would not take "no" for an answer. They begged and pleaded with him until finally he gave in. As the grateful crowd boarded the bus, he switched the vehicle's number to 402 and off they went towards Jerusalem.

As they traveled, one of the passengers could not contain his curiosity. He asked the driver how, in fact, he could do such a thing! "Why are you risking your job for us? It's a sure bet they are going fire you!"

The driver answered, "I'll tell you the truth. The dispatcher sent out a radio message asking for a 400 or 402 driver who would agree to take a group of passengers to Jerusalem, because they already had been waiting at the last stop in Bnei Brak for hours. The dispatcher's request was met with silence, because the drivers of those buses feared the hostile, angry 'greeting' that they would receive from the many who had suffered so much as a result of the bus company's negligence. After all, who wants *Yehudim* cursing him just before Rosh HaShana? When I saw that nobody was accepting the task it occurred to me that if a bus with a number other than 400 or 402 drove up and stopped and the driver would agree to you people to Jerusalem even though his destination was somewhere else, instead of curses he would receive blessings. So I volunteered, because with Rosh HaShana coming, I can use some blessings!"

**The story is used in the following way:**

If a 400 or 402 had pulled up, its driver would have been met with hostility and probably curses, because many in the crowd would have felt that "it was coming to them" that he take them where they needed to go. It is a sin to curse a fellow Jew, but the *yetzer harah* has his ways. Now, though, somebody comes to them in the middle of the night out of the goodness of his heart – a 318 driver headed for Rechovot, and what does he do? He risks his job in order to help them! The reaction was what it was because no one in the crowd felt that he **deserved** this ride to Jerusalem. It wasn't "coming to them." Accordingly, as was appropriate, they expressed heartfelt appreciation for the driver, and blessed him repeatedly.

**So, too**, when a man knows that the Al-Mighty is not obligated to him in any way – not regarding a livelihood, a house, a wife, children or anything else, he suddenly is grateful for all that he has. Unhappiness and hostility set in only when he thinks that everything is coming to him. (*M'eyon HaShavu-ah*)

**This beautiful story is used to illustrate the need for gratitude and how undeserving we really are, and if only we would realize that Hashem does not owe us anything we would wake up with gratitude.**

**Unhappiness and hostility only come from the lack of such gratitude.**

**This story was on a glossy colored paper in shul meant for kids attending and produced by Otzarot in Israel.**

The question is who was the bus driver? The writer suggests it is “another person...out of the goodness of his heart” Yet the Nimshal, the “so too” refers to the Almighty!

**So, too, when a man knows that the Al-Mighty is not obligated to him in any way – not regarding a livelihood, a house, a wife, children or anything else, he suddenly is grateful for all that he has. Unhappiness and hostility set in only when he thinks that everything is coming to him. (*M'eyon HaShavu-ah*)**

If we stretch the Mashal a bit further, we might see some darker strands weaving their way through the motives of the bus driver... what would that do to the pious nimshal?

The Bus driver is clearly the Almighty, He drives the world, and we are the passengers. Then the question becomes why did the driver switch the bus number? He readily admits:

***Yehudim* cursing him just before Rosh HaShana? When I saw that nobody was accepting the task it occurred to me that if a bus with a number other than 400 or 402 drove up and stopped and the driver would agree to you people to Jerusalem even though his destination was somewhere else, instead of curses he would receive blessings. So I volunteered, because with Rosh HaShana**

The implication is that God wanted blessings not curses. The curses come from His people who are fastidious in keeping his commandments! Their rage comes from the possibility of arriving late for Shabbes in Jerusalem!! For not being able to keep the Holy Shabbat!!! Why at this frantic time would He wish blessings?

So, what then is the message of the Mashal? That God will scheme in order to get blessings?

Nothing makes sense.

## Nora Alila

*God of awe, God of might, Grant us pardon in this hour, as Your gates are closed this night.*

*We, who are few, raise our eyes to heaven's height, trembling, fearful in our prayer, as Your gates are closed this night.*

*Pouring out our soul we pray that the sentence You will write shall be one of pardoned sin, as Your gates are closed this night.*

*Our refuge strong and sure rescue us from dreadful plight seal our destiny for joy, as Your gates are closed this night.*

*Grant us favor, show us grace; but those who deny our right and oppress, be You be the judge, as Your gates are closed this night.*

*Generations of our sires strong in faith walked in Your light As of old, renew our days, as Your gates are closed this night.*

*Gather Judah's scattered flock unto Zion's rebuilt site Bless this year with grace divine, as Your gates are closed this night.*

*May we all, both old and young, look for gladness and delight in the many years to come, as Your gates are closed this night.*

*Michael, prince of Israel, Gabriel, Your angels bright with Elijah, come, redeem, as Your gates are closed this night.*

## Psalm 60

ה לכו וראו, מפעלות  
אלהים; נורא עליה, על-  
בני אדם.

**5 Come, and see the works of God;  
He is terrible in His doing toward  
the children of men.**

נורא עליה על בני אדם

ואדם נברא בששאי ועלילה נתלה בו שהוא הביא את המיתה לעולם, שנאמר: כי ביום אכלך ממנו מות תמות (בראשית ב, יו). משל למה הדבר דומה, למי שמבקש לגרש את אשתו, כשבקש לילך לביתו כתב גט, נכנס לביתו והגט בידו, מבקש עלילה לתנו לה. אמר לה: מזגי לי את הכוס שאשתה. מזגה לו. כיון שנטל הכוס מידה, אמר לה: הרי זה גטך. אמרה לו: מה פשעי. אמר לה: צאי מביתי שמזגת לי כוס פשור. אמרה לו: כבר היית יודע שצונו ויחודה למנוח לה בית פשור, שפתבת הגט והבאתו בידך.

Midrash Tanchuma, Vayeshev 4:2

אף כן, אמר אדם לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא, רבוננו של עולם, על שלא בראת עולמך קדם שני אלפים שנה, היתה תורה אצלך אמון, שפך פתיב: ואהיה אצלו אמון ואהיה שעשועים יום יום (משלי ח, ל), שני אלפים שנה, וכתוב בה, זאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל (במדבר יט, יד). אלוילי שהתקנת מות לבריות, היית כותב בה כן. אלא באת לתלות בי את העלילה. הוי, נורא עלילה על בני אדם.

*Adam was created on the sixth day, and He informed him in a **roundabout way** that He had brought death into the world, as it is said: For in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die (Gen 2:17)*

יז ומעץ, הדעת טוב ורע--לא תאכל, ממנו: כי, ביום אכלך ממנו--מות תמות. *17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.'*

*To what may this be compared? It may be compared to a man who wished to divorce his wife. Before he enters his home, he writes out the divorce document and then enters the house with the divorce document in his hand. He then seeks a circuitous way to hand it to her. He says to her: "Give me some water that I may drink." She does so, and when he takes the glass from her hand, he tells her: "Here is your divorce." She asks: "What sin have I committed?" "Leave my house," he retorts, "you have served me a warm drink." "Apparently you already knew," she replies, "that I would serve you a warm drink when you prepared the bill of divorce you brought with you."*

*And that is what Adam told the Holy One, blessed be He: Master of the Universe, two thousand years before You created the world, You had the Torah as an artisan, as it is written:*

ל ואהיה אצלו, אמון: ואהיה שעשועים, יום 30 Then I was by Him, as a nursling; and I was daily  
יום; משחקת לפניו בכל-עת. all delight, playing always before Him,

*Then was I by Him, as an artisan; and I was **day by day** all delight (Prov. 8:30). (The repetition of the word day indicates that two thousand years had elapsed).*

ד כי אלה שנים, בעיניך-- כיום אתמול,  
כי יעבר; when it is past, {N}  
ואשמורה בלילה. and as a watch in the night.

*A thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday (Ps. 90:4). (a day meaning a thousand years had passed since He wrote the Torah).*

*Within it is written: This is the law; that a man dieth in his tent (Num. 19:14).*

יד זאת, התורה, אדם, פי-ימות  
באהל: כל-הבא אל-האהל וכל-אשר  
באהל, יטמא שבעת ימים. 14 This is the law: when a man dieth in a tent, every one  
that cometh into the tent, and every thing that is in the  
tent, shall be unclean seven days.

*If You had not previously decreed death for mankind, You would not have so stated in it (the Torah). The decree of death was thus predicted long before the original sin meriting it.*

*The fact is, You introduced the threat of death against me in a “roundabout way” (sic). Hence He acts circuitously in His doings toward the children of men (Ps. 66:5).*

*Come and see what God has done,*

*his awesome deeds for mankind! The implication is one of a set up! “awesome deeds” now has a darker connotation of scheming....is this our rhetorical implication of the Piyut just before Neila? Does it encode a kind of protest before the gates of Mercy are forever closed at the termination of Yom Kippur?*

ה לכו וראו, מפעלות אלהים; נורא עליה, על-בני אדם.





Judah and Tamar, from "the School of Rembrandt" – attributed to number of painters, including Gerbrand van den Eeckhout and Aelbert van der Gelder (circa 1650-1660)

נוֹרָא עֲלֵיָהּ, עַל-בְּנֵי אָדָם

**The first notion of such a scheming divine are implied in the midrashic commentaries on the Judah and Tamar story in Genesis.**

*Based on a midrash in Genesis where God works His plan BY SCHEMING through the politics of daily life behind the scenes to achieve HIS goals,<sup>3</sup> the midrash states that while the other*

---

<sup>3</sup> For instance in the story of Judah and Tamar, The Rabbis emphasize the hand of Divine Providence in Judah's turning aside to the tent of Tamar. Judah wanted to pass by her, without entering the tent. What did God do? He summoned for him the angel responsible for desire. He [the angel] asked him: "Where are you going, Judah [i.e., why are you passing by the tent]? From where kings stand? From where redeemers stand? [i.e., you should enter the tent, from where kings and redeemers will come forth]." Only then did he "turn aside to her" (v. 16), against his will (Gen. Rabbah 85:8)

brothers were engaged in the sale of Joseph, and Jacob was occupied by his sackcloth and fasting (over the presumed death of Joseph), Judah was busily engaged in taking a wife, and God was engaged in creating the light of the Messiah (who will eventually issue from the union of Judah and Tamar) “Before she was in labor, she gave birth” (Isaiah 66:7)... “It happened at that time” (Gen. Rabba 85:1).

פ"ה

וַיְהִי בְּעֵת הַהוּא וַיֵּרֶד יְהוּדָה מֵאֵת אָחִיו (בראשית לח, א), (מלאכי ב, יא): (בגדה יהודה ותועבה נעשתה וגו', אמר ליה כפרת יהודה שקרת יהודה, ותועבה נעשתה בישראל, יהודה נעשה חליו), מלאכי ב, יא: (כי חלל יהודה קדש ה' אשר אהב. ויהי בעת ההיא), מיכה א, טו: (עד הירש אביא לך יושבת מרשה עד עתלם יבוא, מלפן וקדו'שן של ישראל, עד עתלם יבוא כבודן של ישראל, עד עתלם יבוא, דכתיב) בראשית לח, א: (ויט עד איש עתלמי. ויהי בעת ההוא, רבי שמואל בר נחמן פתח) (ירמיה כט, יא): (כי אנכי ידעתי את המתושבת, שבטים היו עסוקין במכירתו של יוסף, ויוסף היה עסוק בשקו ובמעניו, ראובן היה עסוק בשקו ומעניו, ויעקב היה עסוק בשקו ובמעניו, ויהודה היה עסוק לקח לו אשה, והקדוש קרוי הוא היה עוסק בורא אורו של מלך המשיח, ויהי בעת ההיא וירד יהודה): (ישעיה סו, ז): (בטרגם תחיל ילדה, קדם שלא נולד משעבד הראשון נולד גואל האחרון, ויהי בעת ההוא, מה כתיב למעלה מן הענין, והמדינים מכרו אתו אל מצרים).

This midrash teaches that people are involved in their own affairs and troubles and do not see the sweeping divine plan that takes form before their very eyes, one that is for their own good and that gives them a future and hope.

Yet His working behind the scenes is a **scheming** of sorts. The midrash addresses the connection between the two chapters (37 and 38) of Genesis. Judah's descent immediately follows the sale of Joseph into slavery and the presentation of the cloak dipped in goat's blood, with the telling words to his father, “This we found, discern [haker na] whether this is your son's cloak or not” (Gen. 37:32).

*Jacob's diagnosis, “A wild animal has devoured him; Joseph is torn, torn apart,” rends a deep tear in the fabric of the family.*

*The brothers disband – Judah the first to initiate the rupture; their presence for each other would stir pangs of conscience they could not bear.*

*Jacob withdraws into his sackcloth and fasting, the brothers greedily divvy up the profits of the sale, and Judah turns towards assimilation, through marriage to a Canaanite woman.*

The midrash concludes with a peculiar metaphor of a child born even before the mother is seized with pangs of labor.

Conceived in the Great Mind, God lays out a plot to undermine Judah's plan to assimilate, by thwarting his marriage and continuity through his wayward sons.

God's meta-plot trumps them. Who is the agent of Judah's return? The veiled daughter-in-law, Tamar.

She re-aligns Judah on his path, diverts him from his “descent from the presence of his brothers” (Gen. 38:1). **‘How awesome is God in His dealings with mankind’ (Psalm 66:5)**

## On a Deeper Level...

Since it is Erev Shavuot may I be permitted to go deeper and cite the Leshem.<sup>4</sup>

The Leshem suggests that in the OLAM Ha AKUDIM<sup>5</sup> there are *Gevurot*, that the only way the Divine manifests itself is through restrictions and suffering and obstacles....for *chassadim* only return things back to the divine and it really wants to manifest itself in the real world of constriction.

The manifestation of the divine must therefore take place in a world of restrictions, laws of nature, physics and the black and white world of no mercy.

This the very paradox of the exoteric Jewish philosophical description of a merciful divine and a world based on mercy (*olam chessed yiboneh*). This is encapsulated in the idea of *NORA ALILUT*.

For the Leshem, then, the definition of faith or Emunah (ZOHAR Noach 65) for all people is then the acceptance of the concept of *NORA ALILA* the setup, despite the suffering entailed.

It is the acceptance of the divine roadmap as HIS game, HIS wire diagrams, HIS spiritual physics and the catastrophe of the “*breakage of the vessels*” and the death of the seven kings [*sheva melachim*] and the *shevira* despite the possibility HE could have done some other less painful way.

The Leshem suggests that in the OLAM Ha AKUDIM there are *Gevurot* That the only way the Divine manifests itself is through restrictions and suffering and obstacles....for *chassadim* only return things back to the divine and it really wants to manifest itself in the real world of constriction.

---

<sup>4</sup> Rabbi Shlomo Elyashiv, Rabbi Shlomo Elyashiv, zt”l 12 Teves, 1841 - 27 Adar 1928 zt”l, was the grandfather of present-day Gadol HaDor, Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, shlita. Since his seforim are known by the name, Leshem Shevo v’Achlamah (the names of three stones in the third row of stones in the Ephod), he is often referred to as ‘The Ba’al HaLeshem,’ or just ‘The Leshem.’ Ironically, the yartzheit of the Leshem tends to occur in one of the two weeks that the Torah actually mentions these three words (Parashas Tetzaveh and Parashas Pekudai). The Leshem was one of the greatest Kabbalists over the last couple of hundred years. However, what sets him apart from others, aside from his tremendous depth and breadth of Torah— revealed and hidden—was his phenomenal ability to synthesize all relevant material and lucidly present his discussions and conclusions. Rabbi Elyashiv wrote several seminal works, including Drushei Olam HaTohu (Dayah), in which he discusses, Kabbalistically, the creation of the world up until the version recorded in the Torah. Other seforim, such as Sefer HaKlallim, Hakdamos u’Sha’arim (HaKadosh), and Biurim, focus on similar matters, but also discuss details not mentioned in other works.

<sup>5</sup> *Olam Ha’Akudim* is the first “world” to result from the single initial vessel created by the vapor which emanated from the “mouth” of *Ak*, as explained above. In this world, all of its ten “lights,” its ten *sefirot*, which also emanate from the “mouth” of *Ak*, are all contained within its one single vessel. For this reason, this world is called *Akudim* (“binding”), for all of its lights are “bound” together in one vessel.

This is encapsulated in the idea of **NORA ALILUT** (see piyut for Neilah service). Based on a midrash in Genesis where God works His plan BY SCHEMING through the politics of daily life behind the scenes to achieve HIS goals, taken on a cosmic level this requires us to endure the millennia of exile to further His manifestation.

I love the tension between the midrashic impulse where the notion of scheming is a protest and a mitigation against divine judgment whereas in kabbalah this is transformed into the weight of divine judgment (*gevurot*) must be borne by humankind, on order to fulfil His intra-divine goal for creation as an expulsion of the *gevurot* within.  
We bear this suffering.

I am reminded of the French Philosopher Simone Weil:<sup>6</sup>

It is in affliction itself that the splendor of God's mercy shines ... . If we fall to the point where the soul cannot keep back the cry "my God, why hast thou forsaken me" ... we end by touching ... the very love of God. (Weil, 1951/2009, p. 44)

God can love in us only this consent to withdraw in order to make way for him, just as ... our creator withdrew in order that we might come into being. (Weil, 1947/2002, p. 41)

Let us return to the original story of the bus driver with this insight.

I would like to suggest that in fact the whole story is a set up **נֹרָא עֲלֵיָהּ, עַל-בְּנֵי אָדָם**

We are the passengers and we are bound the laws of Shabbat in a marital bond of the covenant with the Almighty. When the bus fails to show up, when the vicissitudes of life overwhelm us, the galut, the pain and suffering of bearing this weight of tradition, when the bus fails to show up and we are caught lost, nowhere to turn, no preparations for shabbat back home, unable to reach our destination before the time, when in wishing to honor the memory (Hilula) of RASHBI we are crushed under the weight, **עֲלֵיָהּ, עַל-בְּנֵי אָדָם**...

---

<sup>6</sup> Intimations of a Spiritual New Age: I. The Spiritual Emergence and Personal Tragedy of a Universalized Christian Mysticism in the Life and Work of Simone Weil Harry T. Hunt Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada

The bus driver with a different number shows up! And we think BH!!!! Please drive us to our proper destination, not knowing he was the correct bus and driver all along, and the ruse? The scheming? To receive our blessing not curses!!!

In stretching the anthropomorphism to its breaking point, the schemer performs these acrobatic feats of disingenuity in order to receive but also betray his weakness. For he too must be wounded. Unable to accept the curses for being late, he fools us into thinking he is another bus, going to another destination.

How is it possible to God is wounded? We were told by none other than RASHBI the biggest chiddush in Torah, that there is a Schechinah! That She needs our care, That She too is wounded like us, in galut, she wanders like the Lost Princess, looking for Her beloved.

She is the bus driver who needs our blessings to be reunited with Her beloved. She is the Shabbat.

In this horrific tragedy we must understand that there is no understanding..

The one thing we learn from RASHBI is that our understanding is precisely non rational..

That our understanding of the Divine and its ways are counter rational...

RASHBI teaches us that access to the divine is only through the Schechina..

And even more radically She suffers alongside us

That Her suffering parallels our suffering

So our task

Beyond the pain and loss

Is to somehow paradoxically see through our pain to her pain

To realize this tragedy is hers too..

Since our avodah will reunite Her with HKBH

And bring the geulah.