

Tishrei

Techinah of the Matriarchs for the Shofar

INTRODUCTION: Techinot were prayers written in Yiddish, mostly from 17-19th century Eastern Europe, either by or for women. While the purpose was often as a petition, the subjects were generally those that resonated specifically with women.

This remarkable techinah for Rosh Hashanah weaves together themes of the new year (shofar, sacrifice of Isaac, Satan) with the lives of the matriarchs. The focus on their experiences – as women, daughters and mothers – creates a link between the matriarchs and the petitioner.



This female-centric meditation is highly unusual in a liturgical context that largely ignores women.

You might want to print this techinah and place it in your Machzor to be recited during a moment of silent prayer. As you recite it, think about the following questions:

1. How does the petitioner know that the near sacrifice of Isaac caused Sarah “great anguish” since the biblical text is entirely silent on Sarah’s reaction?
2. What women’s themes does this text address?
3. How might women find this techinah comforting?

[Written by the woman, the rabbi's wife, Serel, daughter of the famous rabbi Jacob Segal of Dubno; wife of the rabbi, the luminary, expert in wisdom, Mordechai Katz of blessed memory, Rappoport, head of the rabbinical court of Oleksiniec...]]

Lord of the world, merciful Father, have mercy on us and accept our prayers. For you have commanded your people Israel to blow the shofar in order to confuse Satan so that he may not accuse us....

Today I stand at my judgment, today you reveal your tribunal. Lord of the universe, if I must stand trial, may your attribute of mercy overcome the attribute of justice, and forgive us our sins... And especially now, when we have heard the sound of the shofar....Blow away all our sins with the sound of the shofar. For with our ninefold blowing of the shofar, may the merit of the four matriarchs and the three patriarchs and Moses and Aaron stand by us in this judgment, for they have arisen [to plead for us].

First we ask our mother Sarah to plead for us in the hour of judgment, that we may go out free from before this tribunal....Have mercy, our mother, on your children. And especially, pray for our little children that they may not be separated from us. For you know well that it is very bitter when a child is taken away from the mother, as it happened to you. When your son Isaac was taken away from you, it caused you great anguish. And now you have the chance to plead for us. For he is now blowing the shofar, the horn of a ram, so that God will remember for us the merit of Isaac, who let himself be bound like a sheep on the altar. Therefore, Satan will be confused, and cannot at this moment accuse us. So you have a chance to plead for us, that the attribute of mercy may awaken toward us.

And I also ask our mother Rebecca to plead for our father and mothers, that they may not, heaven forbid, be separated from us. For you well know how one can long for father and mother. When Eliezer, the servant took you away from your father and mother to your husband, Isaac, you also wept copiously. Therefore, you know how bad it is without a father and without a mother. May they have a year of life, a good year, and a year of livelihood, a year in which I and my husband and children will have sustenance and livelihood.

And we also ask our mother Rachel to plead for us, that we may be inscribed and sealed for good, and that we may have a year of life, and a year of livelihood. And may we never suffer any sorrow. We know well that you cannot bear to hear of any sorrow. For when your beloved son Joseph was led to Egypt, the Ishmaelites caused him great sorrow, and he fell on your grave and began to weep, 'Mother, mother! Have mercy on your child! How can you look on my sorrow when you had such love for me? And today, I am so embittered, and you have no compassion for me!' And you could not bear to listen to the sorrow of your child, and you answered him, 'My dear child, I hear your cry, and I will always have compassion when I hear your sorrow.' Therefore, have compassion our sorrow and our anguish and our trembling before the judgment, and plead for us that we may be inscribed for a good year in which there will be no sorrow, Amen.

Also we ask our mother Leah to plead for me and for my children. For now you can all plead for us, for today is the first day of the Ten Days of Penitence [the days from Rosh Hashanah through Yom Kippur]. This is the last moment, for I know how much time I have let slip away without turning in repentance for all [my evil deeds]... Therefore, we ask all our mothers to plead for us that we may be inscribed for life and for peace and for livelihood. May we not, heaven forbid, need to depend on human charity, which is a greater disgrace than God's gift, but rather may we be nourished by your holy hand, Amen, selah.

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