



Esh Kodesh: Finding God in the Midst of Suffering

Class II

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1) Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, p38

[T]he chronicles of the Crusades turn repeatedly to the image of Abraham ready to slaughter Isaac at Mount Moriah.

2) Anonymous Mainz Chronicle, in Abraham Meir Habermann, *Gezerot Ashkenaz ve-Tzarfat*, 96, cited in Aaron Koller, *Unbinding Isaac: The Significance of the Akedah for Jewish Thought*, p. 8.

There was a young man named R. Meshullam, son of R. Isaac. He called out in a loud voice to all those standing there, and to Mrs. Tzipporah, his wife: “Listen to me, old and young! This son, whom God gave to me and Tzipporah my wife bore in her old age, whose name is Isaac, I will now offer him as a sacrifice, just as our father Abraham did with his son Isaac!” Tzipporah answered, “My lord, wait a bit, do not yet stretch out your hand against the lad whom I have raised and nourished, whom I bore in my old age. Slaughter me first, and let me not see the death of the child!” But he answered and said, “I will not wait even a second! The One who gave him to us should now take him back to his portion, and give him a seat in the lap of our father Abraham.” He bound his son, took the knife [ma’akhelet, the rare word for knife used in Genesis 22] in his hand to slaughter his son, made the blessing on ritual slaughter, and slaughtered the lad. He then took his screaming wife. The two of them went outside together, and were immediately killed by the Crusaders.

3) *Leviticus 26:42*

I will remember My covenant [with] Jacob, and also My covenant [with] Isaac, and also My covenant [with] Abraham I will remember.

3) ויקרא כו:מב

וְזָכַרְתִּי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי יַעֲקֹב וְאֶת־בְּרִיתִי יִצְחָק וְאֶת־בְּרִיתִי אַבְרָהָם אֶזְכֹּר



4) Rashi ad loc And why is the expression “remembering” not used with Isaac? [Because] Isaac’s ashes [always] appear before Me, gathered up and placed upon the altar	4) רש"י שם ולמה לא נאמרה זכירה ביצחק, אלא אפרו של יצחק נראה לפני צבור ומונח על המזבח
5) Genesis 23:1-2 Sarah’s lifetime—the span of Sarah’s life—came to one hundred and twenty-seven years. Sarah died in Kiriath-arba—now Hebron—in the land of Canaan; and Abraham proceeded to mourn for Sarah and to bewail her.	5) בראשית כג:א-ב וַיְהִי חַיִּי שָׂרָה מֵאָה שָׁנָה וְעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וְשִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים שָׁנִי חַיִּי שָׂרָה: וַתָּמָת שָׂרָה בְּקִרְיַת אַרְבַּע הוּא חֶבְרוֹן בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַיְבֹא אַבְרָהָם לִסְפֹּד לְשָׂרָה וּלְבַכָּתָה:
6) Midrash Tanhuma Vayeira 23 At that moment, Satan went to Sarah and appeared to her in the likeness of Isaac. When she saw him, she said to him: “My son, what did your father do to you?” He said to her: “My father took me and brought me up mountains and brought me down into valleys, and brought me up to the top of one mountain. There we built an altar; he arranged the wood, laid out the logs, bound me upon the altar, and took the knife to slaughter me. And if the Holy One, blessed be He, had not said to him, ‘Do not stretch out your hand against the lad,’ I would already have been slaughtered.” He had not yet finished speaking when her soul departed. This is what is written: “And Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her.”	6) מדרש תנחומה וירא כג בְּאוֹתָהּ שָׁעָה הָלַךְ הַשָּׁטָן אֶצֶל שָׂרָה וַנִּדְמָה לָהּ כְּדָמוֹת יִצְחָק. כִּיּוֹן שָׂרָאֲתָה אוֹתוֹ אָמְרָה לוֹ: בְּנִי, מָה עָשָׂה לָךְ אָבִיךָ? אָמַר לָהּ: נָטַלְנִי אָבִי וְהֶעֱלֵנִי הָרִים וְהוֹרִידֵנִי בְּקִיעוֹת וְהֶעֱלֵנִי לְרֹאשׁ הַר אֶחָד וּבָנִי מִזְבֵּחַ וְסִדֵּר הַמַּעֲרָכָה וְהֶעֱרִיךְ אֶת הָעֵצִים וְעָקַד אוֹתִי עַל גְּבִי הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וְלָקַח אֶת הַסָּכִין לְשַׁחֲטֵנִי. וְאִלּוּלִי שֶׁאָמַר לוֹ הַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא אֵל תִּשְׁלַח יָדְךָ אֶל הַנֶּעֱר, כְּבָר הָיִיתִי נִשְׁחָט. לֹא הִסְפִּיק לִגְמֹר אֶת הַדְּבָר עַד שֶׁיֵּצְאָה נִשְׁמָתָהּ, הִדָּא הוּא דְכָתִיב, וַיְבֹא אַבְרָהָם לִסְפֹּד לְשָׂרָה וּלְבַכָּתָה. מִהֵיכָן בָּא? מִהַר הַמּוֹרִיָּה.
7) Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer 32:8 And when Abraham came from Mount Moriah, Samael’s anger burned, for he saw that the desire of his heart—to annul Abraham’s offering—had not succeeded. What did he do? He went and said to Sarah: “Oh Sarah, have you not heard what has happened in the world?” She said to him, “No.” He said to her: “Your old husband took the youth Isaac and offered him up as a burnt offering, and the boy was crying and wailing because he could not save himself.” Immediately she began to cry and wail—she cried three cries corresponding to the three tekiōt, and three wailings corresponding to the three yevavot. Her soul flew from her, and she died.	7) פרקי דרבי אליעזר לב:ח וּכְשָׁבָא אַבְרָהָם מִהַר הַמּוֹרִיָּה, חָרָה אַפּוֹ שֶׁל סַמְאֵ"ל, שְׂרָאָה שְׁלֹא עֲלָתָהּ בִּידוֹ תֹאזֶנֶת לָבוֹ לִבְטֹל קֶרְבָּנוֹ שֶׁל אַבְרָהָם, מָה עָשָׂה, הֲלֹךְ וְאָמַר לְשָׂרָה, אִי שָׂרָה, לֹא שָׁמַעְתָּ מָה שֶׁנַּעֲשָׂה בְּעוֹלָם, אָמְרָה לוֹ לֹא, אָמַר לָהּ לֵקַח אִישׁךָ הַזֶּקֶן לְנַעַר יִצְחָק וְהִקְרִיבוֹ לְעוֹלָה, וְהִנֵּער בּוֹכָה וּמִיילִיל שְׁלֹא יָכוֹל לְהִנָּצֵל, מִיַּד הַתַּחֲלִילָה בּוֹכָה וּמִיילִילָת, בִּכְתָּה שְׁלֹשׁ בִּכּוּיֹת כִּנְגַד שְׁלֹשׁ תְּקִיעוֹת, שְׁלֹשׁ יָלּוֹת כִּנְגַד שְׁלֹשׁ יְבֻבוֹת, וּפְרַחָה נִשְׁמָתָהּ וּמָתָה.



8) Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 5a

And that is the statement of Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish, as Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said: The word **covenant is used with regard to salt**, and the word **covenant is used with regard to afflictions**. The word **covenant is used with regard to salt**, as it is written: **“The salt of the covenant with your God should not be excluded from your meal-offering; with all your sacrifices you must offer salt”** (Leviticus 2:13). **And the word covenant is used with regard to afflictions, as it is written: “These are the words of the covenant”** (Deuteronomy 28:69). **Just as, in the covenant mentioned with regard to salt, the salt sweetens the taste of the meat and renders it edible, so too in the covenant mentioned with regard to suffering, the suffering cleanses a person’s transgressions**, purifying him for a more sublime existence.

8) ברכות ה.

והיינו דרבי שמעון בן לקיש, דאמר רבי שמעון בן לקיש: נאמר “ברית” במלח, ונאמר “ברית” ביסורין, נאמר “ברית” במלח, דכתיב: “ולא תשבית מלח ברית” ונאמר “ברית” ביסורין, דכתיב: “אלה דברי הברית”, מה “ברית” האמור במלח — מלח ממתקת את הבשר, אף “ברית” האמור ביסורין — יסורין ממרקין כל עונותיו של אדם.

9) Esh Kodesh Chayei Sarah 5700

It is written in the holy work Ma’or va-Shemesh, at the beginning of Parashat Va’era, in the name of the holy rabbi, the man of God, our teacher and master, Menahem Mendel of Rimanov (may the memory of the righteous and holy be for a blessing), regarding the Talmudic passage: a covenant is made with salt, and a covenant is made with afflictions. Just as salt makes meat palatable, so too afflictions purify the individual of sin: “Just as one cannot derive pleasure from meat that has been excessively salted, rather only if it was properly salted, so too afflictions should be meted out only in such measure that they can be tolerated, and with an admixture of mercy.” Rashi explains that “the death of Sarah was juxtaposed to the binding of Yitzhak because with the news that her son was being bound and was about to be sacrificed, her soul burst forth from her and she died. That is to say, Moshe our Teacher, the faithful shepherd, juxtaposed the death of Sarah to the binding of Yitzhak in order to advocate for us, indicating what results from excessive afflictions, Heaven forbid—her soul burst forth. Furthermore, if this was the case with the tremendously righteous Sarah, who was as blameless at the age of 100 as a twenty-year-old, and all of her years were equally good, yet despite this she was unable to withstand such horrible afflictions—how much the more so does this apply to us. Therefore, may God have mercy upon all of us, all Israel, and save us speedily, both spiritually and physically, with

9) אש קודש, שנת ת”ש, פרשת חיי שרה

אמנם איתא בספיה”ק מאו”ש בריש פ’ וארא מהרב הקדוש איש אלקים מו”ה מנחם מענדיל צצוק”ל מרימנוב, על הגמרא נאמד ברית במלח ונאמד ברית ביסודין מה מלח ממתקת הבשר אף יסורין ממרקין וכו’ דהיינו מה מלח אם מוסיף יותד מכשיעור אי אפשר לקבל הנאה מהבשר רק דוקא אם נמלח כשיעור, כך היסורין יהיו ממוזגים שיהיה יכולת לקבלם ויהיו ממוזגים ברחמים עכ”ל הק’, והנה רש”י פי’ ולמה נסמכה מיתת שרה לעקדת יצחק שע”י וכו’ פרח נשמתה ומתה, היינו שמש”ר רעיא מהימנא סמך מיתת שרה לעקדת יצחק כדי להמליץ טוב בעדנו ולהראות שע”י יסורים ח”ו יותר מדאי מה נעשה, שפחה נשמתה, ועוד באם נעשה כן בשרה, צדיקת גדולה כזו שבת ק’ כבת ב’ לחטא וכו’ ושני חיי שרה שכלן שווים לטובה ומ”מ לא יכלה לסבול יסורים קשים, ומכש”כ אנחנו. לכן ירחם ד’ עלינו כל ישראל ויושיענו במהרה ברוחניות וגופניות בחסדים נגלים. לי קטלי’ פלגא.

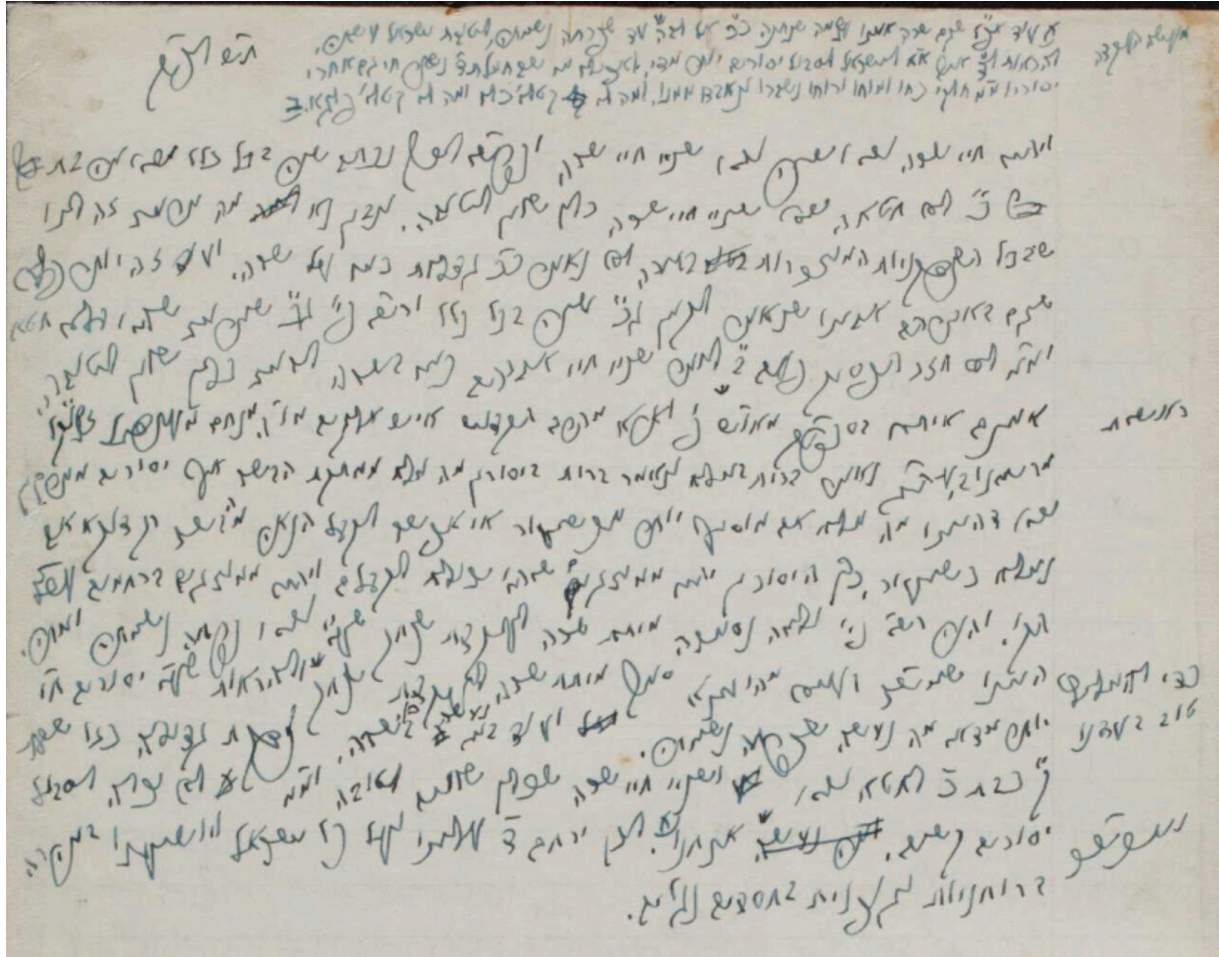


revealed acts of lovingkindness.	
10) Ibid It is written in the holy work Ma'or va-Shemesh, at the beginning of Parashat Va'era, in the name of the holy rabbi, the man of God, our teacher and master, Menahem Mendel of Rimanov (may the memory of the righteous and holy be for a blessing), regarding the Talmudic passage: a covenant is made with salt, and a covenant is made with afflictions. Just as salt makes meat palatable, so too afflictions purify the individual of sin: "Just as one cannot derive pleasure from meat that has been excessively salted, rather only if it was properly salted, so too afflictions should be meted out only in such measure that they can be tolerated, and with an admixture of mercy." Rashi explains that "the death of Sarah was juxtaposed to the binding of Yitzhak because with the news that her son was being bound and was about to be sacrificed, her soul burst forth from her and she died. That is to say, Moshe our Teacher, the faithful shepherd, juxtaposed the death of Sarah to the binding of Yitzhak in order to advocate for us, indicating what results from excessive afflictions, Heaven forbid—her soul burst forth. Furthermore, if this was the case with the tremendously righteous Sarah, who was as blameless at the age of 100 as a twenty-year-old, and all of her years were equally good, yet despite this she was unable to withstand such horrible afflictions—how much the more so does this apply to us. (*Added later: It may also be explained that our mother Sarah herself, who took the episode of the Akedah so deeply to heart that her soul departed, did so for the sake of Israel—to demonstrate before God how it is impossible for Israel to endure excessive suffering. For even one who, through God's compassion, remains alive after suffering, nevertheless parts of his strength, mind, and spirit are broken and lost to him. What difference is there between one who is killed entirely and one who is half-killed? This is what resolves the verse "the years of the life of Sarah". For at first glance, Sarah appears to have erred relative to the rest of her years, since she could have lived had she not taken the matter of the Akedah so deeply to heart. But since she acted for the sake of Israel, the verse hints "the years of the life of Sarah"—that is, the years after	(10) שם אמנם איתא בספח"ק מאו"ש בריש פ' וארא מהרב הקדוש איש אלקים מו"ה מנחם מענדיל זצוק"ל מרימנוב, על הגמרא נאמד ברית במלח ונאמד ברית ביסודין מה מלח ממתקת הבשד אף יסורין ממרקין וכו' דהיינו מה מלח אם מוסיף יותד מכשיעור אי אפשר לקבל הנאה מהבשר רק דוקא אם נמלח כשיעור, כך היסורין יהיו ממוזגים שיהיה יכולת לקבלם ויהיו ממוזגים ברחמים עכ"ל הק', והנה רש"י פי' ולמה נסמכה מיתת שרה לעקדת יצחק שע"י וכו' פרח נשמתה ומתה, היינו שמש"ר רעיא מהימנא סמך מיתת שרה לעקדת יצחק כדי להמליץ טוב בעדנו ולהראות שע"י יסורים ח"ו יותר מדאי מה נעשה, שפירחה נשמתה, ועוד באם נעשה כן בשרה, צדיקת גדולה כזו שבת ק' כבת ב' לחטא וכו' ושני חיי שרה שכלן שווים לטובה ומ"מ לא יכלה לסבול יסורים קשים, ומכש"כ אנחנו. עוד אפ"ל שגם שרה אמנו עצמה) שנתנה כ"כ אל לבה מעשה העקדה עד שפירחה נשמתה, לטובת ישראל עשתה, להראות לד' איך א"א לישראל לסבול יסורים יותר מדי, ואפילו מי שבחמלת ד' נשאר חי גם אחר יסוריו מ"מ חלקי כחו ומוחו ורוחו נשברו ונאבדו ממנו, מה לי קטלי' כלו וזה שמתרץ הפסוק שני חיי שרה, שלכאורה חטאה שרה נגד שאר שנותיה שהי' לה לחיות באם לא לקחה כ"כ אל לבה מעשה העקדה, אבל כיון שלטובת ישראל עשתה מרמז הפסוק שני חיי שרה, היינו שנותי' שלאחר הקצ"ז כולן שוות לטובה כי גם עמהן לא חטאה), לכן ירחם ד' עלינו כל ישראל ויושיענו במהרה ברוחניות וגופניות בחסדים נגלים. לי קטלי' פלגא



the 127 were all equally for the good, for even through them she did not sin.*)

Therefore, may God have mercy upon all of us, all Israel, and save us speedily, both spiritually and physically, with revealed acts of lovingkindness.



11) Daniel Reiser, “Creative Writing in the Shadow of Death” in “Hasidism, Suffering, and Renewal: The Prewar and Holocaust Legacy of Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira”, pp 194-204

[T]he sermons were produced sequentially, one proof succeeding another. Further evidence of this appears in a letter R. Shapira appended to the manuscript with instructions for the reader and publisher, including a system he had devised for proofing his text...I believe that careful investigation of the manuscript’s archaeology, its layers and emendations over time, calls our attention to a human phenomenon worthy of discussion. Many of the marginal notes were actually written late in 1942, though R. Shapira was already aware by late 1941 that Polish Jewry was facing an unprecedented catastrophe from which it might never recover. By the time these last notes were added to the manuscript in 1942, in fact, the mass transports from the Ghetto to the death camps had already begun. R. Shapira must also have known that there was very little



chance that he, his manuscript, or any of his immediate followers would survive. Under these circumstances, his commitment to painstaking, multilayered, and minute revision of his already finished text should not be taken for granted. R. Shapira knew that he was going to die and had already lost all his family, and how did he occupy himself? With correcting and editing his sermons!...

R. Shapira stopped preaching just before the “Great Action,” which began on July 22, 1942. Major parts of his proofreading were carried out after the Ghetto emptied. It is clear that at that point, R. Shapira was not working on his Torah in order to provide hope or self-respect or for the sake of “suffering for the other,” or even for “affective strategies that would allow his followers—and the cosmos itself—to resist collapse,” since there was no longer an audience, or an “other,” or followers, and the cosmos did collapse. It seems to me that his writing, under these circumstances, expresses the value of *torah lishmah* in its most extreme form, as a “ritual in its own right.”

12) Shaul Magid, “Covenantal Rupture and Broken Faith in Esh Kodesh” in “Hasidism, Suffering, and Renewal: The Prewar and Holocaust Legacy of Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira”, p 310

I am specifically interested in his final sermon in the summer of 1942 and a brief addendum he added in November 1942 to a previous sermon, which to my mind breaks through something Shapira never quite acknowledged before: that what he and his community are experiencing, what the Jews are experiencing, has never been experienced before. This admission, apparently a final edit to his writings after he had put his pen to rest, likely a rereading of an earlier sermon after the Great Deportation, is more than a mere depressing flourish, although certainly that too; I think it breaks faith in a covenantal God and sets the stage for what would become post-Holocaust theology a few decades later.

13) Abramson, Henry. Torah from the Years of Wrath 1939-1943: The Historical Context of the Aish Kodesh pp. 82-83

In this notation, the Rebbe pushed the theologically challenging material even further, arguing that Moses was not the only biblical figure to protest excessive suffering—Sarah, by allowing herself to die with the shock of the news of Isaac’s experience, was also issuing the ultimate statement of dissent, and that “she did this for the benefit of the Jewish people.” At the same time, the Rebbe clearly wished to distance Sarah from any culpability for her choice, allowing herself to be “so heartbroken,” perhaps in recognition of those in the Ghetto who could no longer bear a level of suffering that is beyond our comprehension. It is difficult not to read an autobiographical perspective in this sermon—was the Rebbe not expressing a tiny part of his own ineffable anguish?

14) Esh Kodesh Toledot 5700

And then they will come, those who are lost in the land of Assyria, and those who are dispersed in the land of Egypt. There are two distinct categories, the lost and the dispersed. The dispersed refers to one who is displaced to a distant locale, yet remains distinct and recognizable. This is

12) אש קודש, שנת ת"ש, פרשת תולדות

הפסוק אומר ובאו האבדים בארץ אשור והנדחים בא"מ, שישנם בחיי אובדים ובחיי נדחים, נדח הוא שרק נדח ממקומו למקום רחוק אבל ניכר



in contradistinction to the lost—this person is lost, and is neither distinct nor recognizable. For when the hardships are presently so compounded that they even cut off the beards of Jews which make them outwardly unrecognizable—and due to unimaginable persecution and unbearable afflictions, they are no longer recognizable internally—such a person loses himself, he ceases to recognize himself. How did he feel a year ago, on the Sabbath, or on a weekday prior to prayers, or during prayers, etc.? Now he is trampled and crushed, such that he no longer senses if he is a Jew or not, or a human being or not, or an animal which has no capacity to feel. This is the nature of one who is lost, yet they will come, those who are lost. The Talmud teaches that one who has lost something seeks after what was lost. When it was lost, it was no longer perceptible or recognizable, and therefore its owner seeks to find it, to pick it up and bring it home. And is it not God who is the Master of us who are lost? ... Not only at a time when the Israelite is visible and recognizable, but also with respect to those who are lost, unseen, and unrecognized. He will return and give again. The Owner of what has been lost will return to us, find us, and give us all goodness, restore us to Him, blessed be He, and redeem us with redemption and ransom—our bodies and our souls—with abundant mercy and good salvations. May the Owner of the lost return to find us.

ונראה הוא, משא"כ אובד הוא שנאבד לא נראה ולא ניכר, כי כשהצרות מתרבות עתה כ"כ וגם פשוט מספרים זקני ישראל שעי"ז בחיצוניותם אינם ניכרים, ומרוב הרדיפות והיסורים הקשים מנשוא שא"א לשער, גם בפנימיותם אינם ניכרים עד שגם האיש בעצמו אובד א"ע [ער פערלירט זיך] וא"ע אינו מכיר, איך הרגיש עצמו לפני שנה בשבת גם בחול קודם התפילה ובשעת התפילה וכדומה ועתה נדרס ונרמס, עד שאינו מרגיש אם איש ישראל הוא אם אדם הוא או בהמה שאין לה שום מציאות להרגיש, והוא בחי' אובד, ובאו האבדים. אבל הגמרא אומרת (קידושין דף ב') בעל אבדה מחזר אחר אבדתו, כי כשנאבדה האבדה לא נראה ולא ניכרת מחזר בעל האבדה אחרי' למצאה להגביה ולהביאה אליו, והלא הקב"ה הוא בעל האבדה שלנו, ... ולא רק בשעה שאיש הישראלי נראה וניכר, רק גם על האובדים לא נראה ולא ניכר ויחזור ויתן, בעל האבדה יחזור עלינו למצוא אותנו וליתן לנו כ"ט ולהשיבנו אליו ית' ולגאלנו גאולה ופדות גופנו ונפשנו ברחמים רבים וישועות טובות.

