one who is humiliated by others. Accordingly, ashes are placed on the heads of the leaders of the community by others, to increase the appearance of their suffering. The Gemara asks: And where exactly are the ashes placed upon their heads? Rabbi Yitzḥak said: On the place of the phylacteries of the head, as it is stated: “To appoint to those who mourn in Zion, to give to them an ornament [per] instead of ashes” (Isaiah 61:3). This verse likens the placement of ashes on one’s head to an ornament, and the term per is traditionally interpreted as a reference to phylacteries.

The Gemara provides a mnemonic device for the forthcoming statements. Square; ark; and sackcloth; ashes; ashes; cemetery; and Moriah. The Gemara asks: Why do they go out to the square? Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba said: This is a symbolic action, as though to say: We cried out in private inside the synagogue and we were not answered. We will therefore disgrace ourselves in public, so that our prayers will be heard.

Reish Lakiṣh said that the move into the square symbolizes exile, as though they are saying: We have been exiled; may our exile atone for us. The Gemara asks: What is the practical difference between these two explanations? The Gemara answers that the practical difference between them is in a case where they are exiled, i.e., they move, from one synagogue to another synagogue. According to the opinion of Reish Lakiṣh, they have exiled themselves, and therefore this ceremony is adequate. Conversely, Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba maintains that as the ritual is performed in private, it is insufficient.

The Gemara asks another question concerning the meaning of the ritual. And why do they remove the ark to the city square? Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: This is done as though to say: We had a modest vessel, which was always kept concealed, but it has been publicly exposed due to our transgressions.

The Gemara further asks: And why do they cover themselves in sackcloth? Rabbi Hiyya bar Abba said: This is as though to say: We are considered before You like animals, which are likewise covered with hide. And why do they place burnt ashes on top of the ark? Rabbi Yehuda ben Pazi said: This is as though to say in God’s name: “I will be with him in trouble” (Psalms 91:15). Reish Lakiṣh said that the same idea can be derived from a different verse: “In all their affliction, He was afflicted” (Isaiah 63:9). By placing burnt ash on the ark, which is the symbol of the Divine Presence, it is as though God Himself joins the Jews in their pain. Rabbi Zeira said: At first, when I saw the Sages place burnt ashes upon the ark, my entire body trembled from the intensity of the event.

And why do they cover themselves in sackcloth – לָכָה? The early authorities note that some of the practices discussed in the Gemara, e.g., wearing sackcloth and visiting a cemetery, are not explicitly mentioned anywhere in the mishna or the baraita. Rashi notes that wearing sackcloth and visiting a cemetery are mentioned in the Jerusalem Talmud. Some commentators find an allusion to the practice of wearing sackcloth in the message of reproof delivered by the elder that neither sackcloth nor fasting are effective measures for winning divine forgiveness, which indicates that it was indeed customary for people to wear sackcloth on fast days (see the mishna and baraita; Meiri; Mikhtaḥ). Others maintain that the Gemara is indeed inquiring about practices that do not have a source in the mishna or the baraita, but which were nevertheless the prevailing custom (Ritva; Ran).

In all their affliction, He was afflicted – לְכָה. Some commentators explain that the sacred ark containing the Torah scroll represents the Ark in the Temple, upon which God’s Divine Presence once rested (Maharsha). Placing ashes on the ark is a way of saying that God is with His people in their time of affliction. Just as the people cover themselves with ashes, God also acts upon the people as though He participates in their suffering.

Others explain the verse in a slightly different manner: God suffers with the Jewish people, as it were, because His existence and unity are revealed in this world primarily through the Jewish people. Consequently, when the Jews are afflicted, He is afflicted as well (Meiri).
In order to remind God of the ashes of Isaac on our behalf— according to which ashes are placed on one’s head to recall the merit of Abraham, who said: “I am but dust and ashes.” A second opinion, also cited in the Jerusalem Talmud, is that ashes are placed on the head to symbolize the merit of Isaac, as he is considered burnt to ashes upon the altar. According to the first opinion, ordinary earth can substitute for ashes if necessary, whereas according to the second opinion, only ashes are suitable.

Tosafot explain that as ashes serve as a reminder to God of the ashes of Isaac, the source of the ashes must be human bones. Others reject this opinion, arguing that it is inconceivable that human remains should be burnt for this purpose (Rav Yaakov Emden). On the contrary, the Gemara’s association of this custom with the ashes of Isaac proves that human ashes are not required, as Isaac himself was not sacrificed. Rather, the ashes placed on the heads of those fasting serve as a reminder of the ashes of wood burnt on the altar. Yet others explain that the ashes serve as a reminder of the ram that Abraham sacrificed in place of Isaac, which are viewed as equivalent to the ashes of himself.

In order that the deceased will request mercy on our behalf— according to which: 1. The Rif refers to both explanations cited here for visiting the cemetery on communal fast days, whereas the Rambam says only that it is a reminder to those fasting that if they fail to repent they will soon join the dead who are buried there (Rambam Sefer Zemanim, Hilkhot Tashlikh 4:8). It is possible that in this regard the Rambam follows the Jerusalem Talmud, in which only the first reason is mentioned. It has also been suggested that the Rambam rejects the idea that the living appeal to the dead as their intermediaries to petition for mercy (Sefer Halakhot).

From which fear went out to the nations of the world— according to Rashi and Tosafot: Rashi and Tosafot cite an opinion that according to this second explanation, Mount Moriah is identified with Mount Sinai. When the Torah was revealed to the Jewish people on Mount Sinai, the rest of the nation was overcome with fear, as the verse states: “You caused sentence to be heard from heaven; the earth feared, and was still” (Psalms 76:9). Several later commentators note that this explanation is problematic, as it is traditionally accepted that Mount Moriah is the site upon which the Temple was built in Jerusalem, whereas Mount Sinai is outside Eretz Yisrael (Maharsha; Rabbi Tzvi Hirsh Chajes).

Statements of reproof (kibbutshin) – according to which: 1. Rashi understands kibbutshin in the sense of pressing, i.e., statements that press against the heart and force repentance. Others explain that it means suppressed, that is, matters that uncover the suppressed emotions in one’s heart (Ein Yaakov).

A person of imposing appearance – according to which: 1. Several explanations have been suggested for this term. Rashi states that it refers to a tall, imposing person, whose statements of admonition will certainly be heeded. Some claim that it means someone of attractive appearance (commentary on Rif, attributed to Rashiful) while others say it is a minor Torah scholar who does not have the status of a Torah Sage (Rashi). Alternatively, it refers to someone fit to be appointed as a communal leader. Some maintain that we are dealing with a man who is known for his fine moral character and piety (Meiri), or even one who is wise in worldly matters (Maharsha).

And why do they place ashes upon the head of each and every individual? Rabbi Levi bar Ḥama and Rabbi Hanina disagree with regard to this matter. One said that this is as though to say: We are considered like ashes before You. And one said that these ashes are placed in order to remind God of the ashes of our forefather Isaac, on our behalf.9 The Gemara asks: What is the practical difference between these two explanations? The Gemara answers that the practical difference between them is in a case where one placed ordinary earth upon the ark instead of ashes. Although earth does symbolize self-nullification and may be used according to the first explanation, it has no connection to the sacrifice of Isaac, and therefore it does not satisfy the second explanation.

The Gemara further asks: And why do they go out to the cemetery on a fast day? Again, Rabbi Levi bar Ḥama and Rabbi Hanina disagree with regard to this matter. One said this is as though to say: We are like the dead before You. And one said that one goes out to the cemetery in order that the deceased will request mercy on our behalf.9 The Gemara asks: What is the practical difference between them? The Gemara answers that the practical difference between them concerns graves of gentiles. If the purpose of going to graves is to say that they stand before God like the dead, graves of gentiles would suffice. However, if they go to the cemetery for the deceased to ask for mercy on their behalf, they should visit specifically Jewish graves.

Apropos disputes between Rabbi Levi bar Ḥama and Rabbi Hanina, the Gemara mentions another dispute between them. What is the meaning of the name Mount [Har] Moriah, the Temple Mount? Rabbi Levi bar Ḥama and Rabbi Hanina disagree with regard to this matter. One said that the name alludes to the Great Sanhedrin that convened there, as it is the mountain from which instruction [hora’ah] went out to the Jewish people. And one said that it is the mountain from which fear [morah] went out to the nations of the world,9 as this place signifies God’s choice of the Jewish people.

The mishna taught: The eldest of the community says to them statements of reproof.8 The Sages taught in a baraita: If there is an elder, then the elder says the admonition, and if not, a Sage says the admonition. And if not, a person of imposing appearance says it. The Gemara asks: Is that to say that the elder of whom we spoke is preferred to a scholar simply by virtue of his age, even though he is not a scholar? Abaye said that this is what the mishna is saying: If there is an elder, and he is also a scholar, this elder scholar says the admonition. And if not, even a young scholar says the reproof. And if there is no scholar of any kind available, a person of imposing appearance says it.

The ashes of Isaac — according to which: 1. Although Isaac was not in fact sacrificed, as God provided a ram to be sacrificed in his place, this animal is considered as though it were actually the patriarch Isaac, as both Abraham and Isaac were entirely willing to offer the supreme sacrifice of their own lives. The binding of Isaac became a model for those Jewish martyrs who actually gave their lives in sanctification of God’s name. This is why reference is sometimes made to the ashes of Isaac, as with respect to their willingness and intention it was as though Isaac had truly sacrificed himself in obedience to a divine command, by virtue of which Isaac’s descendants became the chosen people.

They go out to the cemetery — according to which: 1. After prayer services on public fast days, the people go out and visit the cemetery, as a reminder that they will be like the dead unless they repent of their evil ways, in accordance with the first explanation of the Gemara. Consequently, if there are no Jewish cemeteries in the area, they can visit a non-Jewish cemetery (Rema). However, common practice follows the second opinion, according to which only a Jewish cemetery should be visited (Magen Avraham). This is the source of the custom followed in many communities to visit a cemetery on the Ninth of Av (see Tosafot; Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim 579:3). The eldest of the community says to them statements of reproof — according to which: 1. If an elder who is also a Torah Sage is present, he rebukes the congregation. If there is no elderly Sage present, a young Torah scholar is chosen to reprove the people. If there is no Sage at all, a man of imposing physical appearance delivers the admonition (Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim 579:1).
A person who has a transgression in his hand – יושב יד בידםALER: One who confesses to a transgression without wholeheartedly committing himself to refrain from sinning again in the future is likened to someone who immerses himself while holding a dead creeping animal in his hand, as he remains ritually impure until he casts the animal away (Rambam Gittin 579:1).

One who has dependent children but he does not have the means – יושב יד בידםaler: On a communal fast it is preferable to appoint as prayer leader one who is well versed in the prayers and in reading from the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings. He should have children who are financially dependent upon him, without enough money to support them. He should have work to do in the field. Also, there should be no major sinners among the members of his household, and he should not have had a bad reputation as a young man. Furthermore, he should be humble and well liked by the congregation. Finally, he should know the proper melodies for the liturgy and have a pleasant voice. It is best if an elder can be found with all these qualities, but if not, a young man should be chosen (Shulhan Arukh, Orach Hayyim 579:1).

Apropos the repentance of the inhabitants of Niniveh, the Gemara discusses their behavior further. The verse states: "But let them be covered with sackcloth, both man and beast" (Jonah 3:8). What did they do? They confined the female animals alone, and their young alone, in a different place. They then said before God: Master of the Universe, if you do not have mercy on us, we will not have mercy on these animals. Even if we are not worthy of your mercy, these animals have not sinned.

The verse states: "And let them turn, every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands" (Jonah 3:8). What is the meaning of the phrase "and from the violence that is in their hands"? Shmuel said that the king of Niniveh proclaimed: Even if one stole a beam and built it into his building, he must tear down the entire building and return the beam to its owner. Although the Sages decreed that one need only pay financial compensation in a case of this kind, these people wanted to repent completely by removing any remnant of stolen property from their possession.

Similarly, Rav Adda bar Ahava said: A person who has a transgression in his hand, and he confesses but does not repent for his sin, to what is he comparable? To a person who holds in his hand a dead creeping animal, which renders one ritually impure by contact. As in this situation, even if he immerses in all the waters of the world, his immersion is ineffective for him, as long as the source of ritual impurity remains in his hand. However, if he has thrown the animal from his hand, once he has immersed in a ritual bath of forty se’ah, the immersion is immediately effective for him.

As it is stated: “He who covers his transgressions shall not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them shall obtain mercy” (Proverbs 28:13). That is, confession alone is futile, but one who also abandons his transgressions will receive mercy. And it states elsewhere: “Let us lift up our heart with our hands to God in Heaven” (Lamentations 3:41), which likewise indicates that it is not enough to lift one’s hands in prayer; rather, one must also raise his heart and return to God.

The mishna teaches: They stood for prayer, and the congregation appoints an elder. The Sages taught in a baraita: They stood for prayer, and even if there is a man there who is elderly and a scholar, they appoint to descend before the ark as prayer leader only a person who is accustomed to lead in prayer. Who is considered an accustomed prayer leader in this sense? Rabbi Yehuda says: One who has financially dependent children but he does not have the means to support them, and he has no choice but to toil in the field, and whose house is empty, and who will therefore pray for rain with great devotion.
Rav Yitzhak bar Ami – a Babylonian amorah of the third generation, Rav Yitzhak bar Ami was a student of Rav Hisda, in whose name he transmitted statements. Several of Rav Yitzhak bar Ami’s halakhic rulings and interpretations of verses are recorded in the Gemara.

### NOTES

That his house is empty of transgression – Rav Yitzhak bar Ami explains that the expression: One whose house is empty of transgression, means that his house must be free of major sins, his household must be entirely free of major transgression.

Rabbi Yehuda continues with his description of the worthy prayer leader. And his youth was becoming, and he is humble and accepted by the people, as he is likable. And furthermore, he must be familiar with songs and his voice pleasant, and he is expert in reading the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings, and he knows how to study midrash, halakha, and aggada. And finally, he must be expert in all of the blessings. Clearly, it is hard to find someone with all these qualities. And the Gemara relates that when this worthy person was described, those Sages present turned their eyes toward Rav Yitzhak bar Ami, who possessed all of these virtues.

The Gemara asks a question concerning the explanation of Rabbi Yehuda: One who has dependent children and does not have anything with which to support them is apparently the same as one whose house is empty. Why does Rabbi Yehuda list both descriptions? Rav Hisda said: This expression means that his house is empty of transgression. And Rabbi Yehuda further said that the prayer leader must be one whose youth was becoming. In explanation of this phrase, Abaye said: This is one who did not have a bad reputation at any time during his youth.

The Gemara cites a verse in relation to the prayer leader: “My heritage has become to me as a lion in the forest. She has uttered her voice against me; therefore I have hated her” (Jeremiah 12:8). What is the meaning of the phrase: She has uttered her voice against me? Mar Zutra bar Toviyya said that Rav said, and some say Rabbi Ha’ama said that Rabbi Elazar said: This is an unworthy prayer leader who descends before the ark. When this person calls out to God, He thinks, so to speak: I hate the sound of his prayer.

§ The mishna teaches: And the prayer leader recites twenty-four blessings before them: The eighteen blessings of the everyday Amida prayer, to which he adds another six blessings. The Gemara asks: Are these six blessings? In fact, they are seven, as we learned in a mishna: For the seventh he recites, Blessed are You, Lord, Who has mercy on the Land. Rav Nahman bar Yitzhak said: What is the meaning of the seventh blessing? This is referring to the seventh for length, i.e., there were actually six new blessings, but as the prayer leader lengthens the sixth weekday blessing it is considered an additional blessing.

As it is taught in a baraita: In the blessing of: Redeemer of Israel, the prayer leader lengthens the blessing, and for its conclusion he recites: He Who answered Abraham on Mount Moriah, He will answer you and hear the sound of your cry on this day. Blessed are You, Lord, Redeemer of Israel. And the community answers amen after him. And the sexton says to them: Blow a long, unwavering sound, sons of Aaron, blow.

And the prayer leader resumes and recites the second blessing, concluding: He Who answered our forefathers by the Red Sea, He will answer you and hear the sound of your cry on this day. Blessed are You, Lord, Who remembers the forgotten. And the community answers amen after him. And the sexton says to them: Blast a wavering sound, sons of Aaron, blast. And similarly, this is the procedure for each and every additional blessing: After one blessing he says: Blow a long, unwavering sound, and after the next one he says: Blast a wavering sound.
The Gemara asks: In what case is this statement said? This method applies in the outlying areas, i.e., everywhere except in the Temple. However, in the Temple itself this is not the correct procedure,92 as one does not answer amen in the Temple. Instead, one responds with a long blessing. The Gemara inquires: And from where is it derived that one does not answer amen in the Temple?

The Gemara answers: As it is stated: “Stand up and bless the Lord, your God, from everlasting to everlasting, and let them say: Blessed be Your glorious name, that is above all blessing and praise” (Nehemiah 9:5). One might have thought that for all blessings there should be only one praise, i.e., all blessings are answered with amen. Therefore, the verse states: “That is exalted above all [al kol] blessing and praise,” which indicates that for every [al kol] blessing, you should give it its own praise.

But if so, in the Temple, what would the prayer leader recite? He would conclude the blessing: Blessed be the Lord, God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Blessed are You, Lord, Redeemer of Israel. And instead of amen, they answer after him: Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom forever and all time. And the sexton says to them: Blow, priests, sons of Aaron, blow.

And the prayer leader resumes and recites the second blessing, concluding: He Who answered Abraham on Mount Moriah, He will answer you and hear the sound of your cry on this day. Blessed be the Lord, God of Israel, Who remembers the forgotten. And the community answers after him: Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom forever and all time. And the sexton says to them: Blast, priests, sons of Aaron, blast, etc. And similarly, this is the procedure for each and every additional blessing: After one blessing he says: Blow a long, unwavering sound, and after the next one he says: Blast a wavering sound, until he concludes all the blessings.

The Gemara relates: And this was the custom Rabbi Halafta established in the city of Tzippori, and Rabbi Hananya ben Teradyon in the city of Sikhini. And when this matter came before the Sages, they said: They would act in accordance with this custom only93 at the Eastern Gate of the Temple and on the Temple Mount, but not outside the Temple.

However, in the Temple this is not the correct procedure – פֶּרֶק ה: **HALAKHA**. Some commentaries explain the difference between the congregation’s response in the Temple and elsewhere as follows: In the Temple, where the personal name of God is pronounced as it is written, the proper response to a blessing is Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom forever and all time. Conversely, in the areas outside of the Temple, where the name is not pronounced as it is written, those who answered with amen in the Temple this is not the correct procedure. Instead, one responds with a long blessing. The Gemara inquires: And from where is it derived that one does not answer amen in the Temple?

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And some say that they acted as it is taught in a baraita: And he recites twenty-four blessings before them: The eighteen blessings of the everyday Amida prayer, to which he adds another six blessings. And those extra six, where does he recite them? Between the blessings: Redeemer of Israel, and: Healer of the sick. And he lengthens the earlier prayer of redemption, and the congregation answers amen after him, for each and every blessing. And this was the custom in the outlying areas, outside the Temple.

However, in the Temple they would recite: Blessed be the Lord, God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Blessed are You, Lord, Redeemer of Israel, and they would not answer amen after him. And why did the practice differ so much? Because one does not answer amen in the Temple. And from where is it derived that one does not answer amen in the Temple? As it is stated: "Stand up and bless the Lord, your God, from everlasting to everlasting, and let them say: Blessed be Your glorious Name, that is exalted above all blessing and praise" (Nehemiah 9:5). As stated above, this verse indicates that for every blessing, you should give it its own praise.

The Sages taught: In concluding the first blessing he recites: Blessed be the Lord, God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Blessed are You, Lord, Redeemer of Israel, and they would answer after him: Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom forever and all time. And the sexton says: Blow, priests, blow. And he resumes the blessings and recites: He Who answered Abraham on Mount Moriah, He will answer you and hear the sound of your cry on this day. And they blow a long, unwavering sound, and blast a wavering sound, and blow. And for the second blessing he recites: Blessed be the Lord, God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting, who remembers the forgotten, and they would answer after him: Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom forever and all time.

And the sexton says: Blast, sons of Aaron, blast. And he recites: He Who answered Abraham on Mount Moriah, He will answer you and hear the sound of your cry on this day. And they blow and blast and blow. And similarly, for each and every blessing: After one he says: Blow, and after the next one he says: Blast, until he concludes all of them.

As it is stated: "Stand up and bless the Lord, your God, from everlasting to everlasting, and let them say: Blessed be Your glorious Name, that is exalted above all blessing and praise" (Nehemiah 9:5). As stated above, this verse indicates that for every blessing, you should give it its own praise.

The mishna taught: Rabbi Yehuda says: The prayer leader did not need to recite the Remembrances and Shofarot passages. Instead, he recited verses dealing with famine and suffering. Rabbi Adda from Jaffa’ said: What is Rabbi Yehuda’s reason? Rabbi Yehuda maintains that one recites Remembrances and Shofarot.

NOTES

And they blow and blast and blow – Some commentators maintain that after the first blessing the priests blew an unwavering sound (tekia), followed by a wavering sound (tena), and then a tekia; after the second blessing they sounded a tena, a tekia, and another tena; alternating the order of the blasts after each blessing (Rambam Sefer Zemanim, Hilkhot Taanit 4:7). According to other versions of the text, cited by early commentators, the blasts were sounded in the same order after each blessing, i.e., tekia, tena, tekia. Alternatively, one blessing was followed by a tekia, the next by a tena, and the following by a tekia (see Riva).

PERSONALITIES

Rabbi Adda from Jaffa – An amorah from Eretz Yisrael, this Sage is seldom mentioned in the Talmud. It is likely that he was from the third generation of amoraim. Jaffa is not known to have been an important Torah center, but Rabbi Adda’s name shows that there were some Sages of note there. The sources indicate that he was the father of Rabbi Haiya.