



Loose partial translation (page numbers from 1956 edition of *Samuch v'Nireh*)

(211) The train wandered among the mountains, not finding its path. All of my fellow passengers departed, and I remained *alone*. Aside from the conductor and the engineer, no one remained. Suddenly, the train halted and did not budge. I knew that the train was over for me, and I would need to go on foot in strange places, among strange people whose language I would not know and whose ways I would not recognize. On another day this would not have pained me – just the opposite, I would have been pleased that a nice stroll had happened upon me, unexpected. But that night I was not pleased. It was the evening of *Z'chor Brit*, the next day would be Rosh HaShanah. How could I observe this holy day *without communal prayer* and without shofar? I rose from my place and looked outside. The mountains were silent; a fearsome darkness surrounded me.

The conductor came and said, "Yes, sir, the train has halted and it cannot move." He saw my pain, and he took my bag, placed it on the bench, and continued to say, "Let sir place his head upon his bag; perhaps he will sleep and gather strength, for he has a long path before him." I nodded to him and said, "Fine, fine, sir." I stretched out on the bench and placed my head on my bag.

Before daybreak, the conductor returned. He scratched his temples and said, "Since we are far from civilization, I must wake sir from his sleep, for if he wishes *to reach people* before nightfall he will need to hurry." I rose from my place and took my stick and my bag, while he showed me where to turn and where to go.

The morning rose and the stars set. The mountains began to remove their nighttime garb, and the springs emerging from the mountains shone from among them. The mountains raised their heads, and narrow trails wove between the mountains. Upon them the dew rested, and a bird pecked in the morning dew. I looked here and there. From far and near were mountains and stones, and from near and far there was no settlement. And the path was long and the feet were heavy and the day was short and the hour was pressing. Gd knows when I will reach a settled city, and whether *I will see a human face today*.

(212) I don't know whether I went on the path the conductor showed me, or whether I strayed from the path. Either way, the day passed and the sun started to set... There was still a *kortov* of day in the world, but the night was coming. This was the day of the last year and the night of the new year, and between day and night, between year and year, *far from man and city*, I stood as a traveller with my stick and my bag, and I did not know where I would go and where I would lay my head...

I lay on the ground and I looked at the dark skies. This was the night of Rosh HaShanah, and all Israel would be standing and *praying in large groups*, and the women would have lit candles already in honour of the day, before nightfall, so as to enter the new year with light and joy. And that man lay in a dark land, among the beasts of the earth. And if he would reach a place of civilization tomorrow, he might not find a Jew. Israel is a scattered sheep, *wherever a Jew goes he finds Jews*, but here all of the communities had been destroyed, and Israel had not returned...

(213) From the sound of my own falling I awoke, and I heard a human voice. Since I knew I was far from civilization, I said to myself, "I must be dreaming a dream." But since I longed to see a person, I said to myself, "Perhaps, maybe, I am awake." I raised my eyes and I saw two men, and behind them two women. The morning mists hung below the mountains, and the men and women were walking above the mountains, above the mist.

I raised myself from my place and went to greet them. Another two came, and another two, these from the spine of the mountain and these from the bottom of the mountain. And after them their wives, two from here and two from here. They joined and walked as one, two after two. Their clothes were clothes of modesty and humility. They wore white tunics over their clothing and white turbans on their heads, and a silver band, two fingerbreadths wide, bordered their turbans, tied at the back of the neck. A *tallit* hung over their shoulders, and a belt was placed over their clothing, and they were marked with beards and the signs of *peiot*, and in their hands were old, black texts – *machzorim* or *siddurim*. Just as the men were clothed in clothes of modesty and

humility, so the women were clothed in clothes of modesty and humility. Their heads were covered in white turbans, formed like an Assyrian letter \beth , covering the head and forehead and edging on part of the face and chin. I greeted them with peace, and they responded with peace.

I asked them, "My brothers, where are you from and where are you going?" They pointed with their hands to the mountains and said, "We are going to the house of Gd." I said to them, "Are there Jews here?" They told me, "In the past, all of the places here had sprawling sacred communities, and through our great sins and the wickedness of the nations they were burned and killed and destroyed, and all of the synagogues were demolished, and none remain but a Jew here and a Jew there. And on the three festivals and on Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur and Rosh Chodesh Sivan – the day of the great massacre – *we gather together and make a minyan and pray communally.*" They spoke a deep German, but the voice, the voice of Yaakov sweetened their language a bit. (214) Their black, beautiful eyes gazed out from sorrow and worry, like people who stand at sundown and *look for a tenth for the minyan.*

We arrived at a ruin, of great stones. On the walls inside were signs of congealed blood, the blood of martyrs who had killed themselves, their wives, their sons and their daughters, lest they fall into the hands of the accursed ones. And the scent of fire bubbled from within the ruin, for after the martyrs had slaughtered themselves, the accursed ones had set the synagogue on fire. Over the Ark a heavy curtain was hung; in the past it had been white, but now it was black. Signs of congealed blood were visible on it, from the martyrs whose blood had reached the curtain.

When we entered we found three men who had come before us. Among them was an elder, standing stooped, his head resting on an old, black *machzor* on the *teivah* [*shulchan*]. He was clothed like the other people of that place, but they wore gray pants and he wore white pants. And there was a *tallit katan* over his garments, and over that a robe, and a *tallit* wrapped over his turban. Because of the sanctity of the day and the sanctity of the place, they did not speak – not in a mundane tongue and not in the sacred tongue.

The elder raised his head from the *teivah* and he looked into the synagogue. He rapped on the *machzor* and said, "*Olam!* We already have a *minyan*, let's pray." They responded, saying, "Shemuel Levi still has not arrived." The elder said, "Why has he not come, why is he delaying the prayer?" One raised his ear and said, "I hear the sound of steps, he is coming." But it is not so; the steps are not his steps. A non-Jewish woman entered and asked, "Who is the gravedigger here?" One removed his *tallit* from his face and asked her, "Why do you ask?" She told him, "The Jew Levi is about to die; he may already be dead. He sent me to tell you to come take care of his burial." The entire group groaned a harsh groan, and they looked at each other as people look at a young orphan who has suddenly become orphaned. Each one felt as though he was the orphaned one, and he was the orphan.

The elder asked, "*Olam!* What does a non-Jewish woman want in a holy place?" They told him. He groaned and said, "He was a good Jew, he was a good Jew, woe that he has died, woe that he has died." (215) The elder looked at me and said, "Blessed be Gd who brought you here. *He brought you only to complete the minyan.*" He rapped on the *machzor* and said, "The dead do not praise Gd, and those who descend to *Dumah*. And we will bless Gd, now and forever, sing to Gd. *Olam!* Thank Gd, we have a *minyan!* Let us rise and pray." He lowered his *tallit* over his face and began to recite the blessings. Immediately, all of them raised their *tallitot* from their necks and wrapped themselves in them over their heads. They said the blessings and *Hallelukah* paragraphs and *Borchu* and the *piyutim*. They recited *Shema* and stood for the *amidah*. They took Torah scrolls from the Ark and read the Torah. And I, Shemuel Yosef son of Rabbi Shalom Mordechai HaLevi, ascended to the Torah in place of their friend, Shemuel Levi, who had left life for us. After shofar blowing and *musaf*, we descended to escort our friend to the place of his eternity.

So that they would not fail *to have communal prayer on Yom Kippur*, I delayed my travels until after Yom Kippur. Since I was a man with nothing to do, and I was available for myself, I walked among them during those intervening days, from house to house, from person to person. Their houses are small and low, like the height of an average man, and each house is of one small room, and a stone wall surrounds the yard, and a wood *succah* is connected to the room – they call it a "summer house" all year, and for Succot they make it kosher for

a *succah* for the festival. But each year they need to set it up and build it, for the wind blows the walls away to the *techum Shabbat* and beyond. And the doors of their homes are all made of one measure, one width, for when their ancestors built a house they made the door the measure of a bier for the dead, such that if they would take a person out to the place of his eternity, they could take him out without strain...

(216) Because of the difficulty of *parnasah* and the pain of poverty, their sons left for big cities and drew their sisters after them, and for their weddings they send for their parents. Some parents have conceded and gone, and right after the *chuppah* they exit quietly and go back to their houses on foot. Old Mrs. Zuckerman told me, "At my son's wedding, *which was very public, I went outside to draw air.* I saw my husband sitting on the steps of the house, his head between his knees. I said to him: Does a man sit like this at his son's wedding? My husband replied and said to me: All of that noise, I cannot bear it. I said to him: Then let us return home. He stood up and said: Let's go back. Immediately, we picked ourselves up and set our feet and walked all night, and in the morning our feet were standing on the floor of our home." Mrs. Yotlan, wife of Reb Kushman, brother-in-law of the Chaver Reb Anshel Disterberg, nephew of old R' Anshel the chazan, *moreh tzedek* and *shochet ubodek*, told me likewise.

Because they had not merited to fulfill the mitzvah of welcoming guests for many years due to the lack of guests [lit. travellers] in their area, they strained greatly for me. Each of them worked for me with love, affection and honour...

(217) Because of the decrees, they have special customs. They do not say *Aleinu* after prayer, not in private and not in public. If one longs to say *Aleinu*, he covers his face and says it quietly, because with this song of praise our holy ancestors ascended the fire, singing from within the fire the praise of Gd. And their practice is to say *Av haRachamim* every Shabbat, even the Shabbat of a wedding...

(218) They do not perform Tashlich at rivers or wells, because the non-Jews would say that Jews put in poison and poisoned the water. Rather, each person has a well in his yard and says Tashlich at that well. And even though the suspicion is gone, the custom has not left...

(220) After Yom Kippur, in the morning, I went on my way. When I was leaving, the entire group came out to escort me, standing atop the mountains. Five or six times I turned my head back and looked at them, until they were swallowed up in blue mists. I seized my path and walked until I reached the train, for in the interim they had brought tradesmen and fixed it. I traveled by train to the port. From there I went by boat to the place of my desire, to the Land of Israel. Blessed is Gd, who returned me to my place.

Admiring Agnon's Craft

1. Yehoshua 3:16

וַיַּעֲמְדוּ הַמַּיִם הַיְרֵדִים מִלְּמַעְלָה קָמוּ גִדְאֹתָד הַרְחֵק מֵאֵדָם הָעִיר...

And the water descending from above halted, standing in one pile, far from the city of Adam...

2. Yirmiyahu 50:17

שֶׁהָ פְּזוּרָה יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲרִיּוֹת הַדִּיחוּ הָרְאשׁוֹן אָכְלוּ מֶלֶךְ אַשּׁוּר וְזֶה הָאֲחֵרוֹן עֲצָמוּ בְּבוּכְרָאצַּר מֶלֶךְ בָּבֶל.

Israel is a scattered sheep, driven by lions. The first was consumed by the king of Assyria; the last has been smashed by Nebuchadrezzar, King of Babylon.

3. Iyov 17:9

וַיֵּאחַז צְדִיק דְּרָכוֹ וְטָהֲרֵינִים יִסִּיף אִמְצָן.

The righteous one grasps his path, and the one of pure hands increases strength.

4. Talmud, Shabbat 63b

צִיץ כַּמִּין טָס שֶׁל זֶהב, וְרוּחַב שְׁתֵּי אַצְבָּעוֹת, וּמוֹקֵף מֵאוּזֵן לְאוּזֵן.

The *tzitz* was a sort of gold plate, two fingers wide, and it extended from ear to ear.

5. Talmud, Horiyot 12a

כיצד מושחין את המלכים? כמין נזר, ואת הכהנים? כמין כי.

How did they anoint kings? Like a crown. And priests? In a form of *chi*.

6. Talmud, Yoma 57a

כשהוא מזה, אינו מזה על הפרוכת אלא כנגד הפרוכת. אמר רבי אלעזר ברבי יוסי: אני ראיתיה ברומי, והיו עליה כמה טיפי דמים של פר ושעיר של יום הכפורים.

When sprinkling [on Yom Kippur], he sprinkled not on the curtain, but opposite the curtain. Rabbi Elazar, son of Rabbi Yosi said: I saw it in Rome, and it bore several drops of blood from the bull and goat of Yom Kippur.

The suffering of a Derech, without the benefits

7. Midrash, Bereishit Rabbah 39:11

אמר רבי חייא לפי שהדרך מגרמת לשלשה דברים, ממעטת פריה ורביה, וממעטת את היציאה וממעטת את השם.

Rabbi Chiya said: The road causes three things: It reduces procreation, it reduces commerce and it reduces reputation.

8. Talmud, Eruvin 65a

אמר רבי אלעזר: הבא מן הדרך אל יתפלל שלשה ימים.

Rabbi Elazar said: One who comes in from the road should not pray the *amidah* for three days.

The Derech of Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur

9. Rambam (12th century Egypt), Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Teshuvah 2:4

מדרכי התשובה להיות...משנה שמו כלומר "אני אחר, ואיני אותו האיש שעשה אותן המעשים."

Among the paths of teshuvah is for him to... change his name, as if to say, "I am someone else, not the person who committed those deeds."

10. Talmud, Megilah 31b

עזרא תיקן להן לישראל שיהו קורין קללות שבתורת כהנים קודם עצרת, ושבמשנה תורה קודם ראש השנה. מאי טעמא? אמר אביי ואיתמא ריש לקיש: כדי שתכלה השנה וקללותיה...

Ezra enacted for Israel to read the curses of Vayikra before Shavuot, and those of Devarim before Rosh haShanah. Why? Abbaye, or Reish Lakish, said: So that the year and its curses should end...