



#StayHomeWithAlyth



עַל חַטָּא שְׁחָטְאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּתַמְהוֹן לִבָּב

For the sin we have committed before You... by giving into despair
Cantor Tamara Wolfson, Yom Kippur 5781

What exactly does “*timhon levav*” mean? Here are a few translations...

Seder Ha'tefillot: Prayers for the High Holydays p.322

וְעַל חַטָּא שְׁחָטְאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּתַמְהוֹן לִבָּב:

And for the sin we committed before You by **giving into despair**.

Machzor Yom Kippur Ashkenaz, p.97

וְעַל חַטָּא שְׁחָטְאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּתַמְהוֹן לִבָּב:

And for the sin we committed before You by **a confused heart**.

JPS 1985 Footnotes, Deuteronomy 28:5

וְעַל חַטָּא שְׁחָטְאנוּ לְפָנֶיךָ בְּתַמְהוֹן לִבָּב:

And for the sin we committed before You by **numbness of heart**.

Timhon le'vav in Biblical text...

Deuteronomy 28:15

וְהָיָה אִם-לֹא תִשְׁמַע בְּקוֹל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשַׁמֵּר לַעֲשׂוֹת כְּ-כָל-מִצְוֹתָיו וְחֻקֹּתָיו אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מְצַוֶּה
הַיּוֹם וּבָאוּ עָלֶיךָ כָּל-הַקְּלָלוֹת הָאֵלֶּה וְהִשְׁיִגְוֶךָ:

But if you do not obey the Eternal your God to observe faithfully all God's commandments and laws which I enjoin upon you this day, all these curses shall come upon you and take effect...

Deuteronomy 28:28

יִכְפְּכָה יְהוָה בְּשִׁגְעוֹן וּבְעִוְרוֹן וּבְתַמְהוֹן לִבָּב:

...the Eternal will strike you with madness, blindness, and **dismay**.

Rashi on Deuteronomy 28:28:1

יִכְפְּכָה יְהוָה בְּשִׁגְעוֹן וּבְעִוְרוֹן וּבְתַמְהוֹן לִבָּב:

ובתמהון לבב means “**clogging of the heart**”; *etourdison* in old French

Rashi on Deuteronomy 28:37

לשמה. כמו תמהון, אשׁוּ אשטורדישו״ן, כָּל הַרוֹאֶה אוֹתְךָ יִשָּׂם עָלֶיךָ

This word means the same as **תמהון**, *etourdison* in old French, **astonishment**. — “Whoever will see you will be astonished about you.”

Rav Simcha Zissel Ziv (1824-1898), *Yalkut Lekach Tov, Devarim Vol. 2, p.97*

בתמהון לבב is the **closing off of the heart**, as if a deep sleep overwhelms the person. It's similar to when a person is put to sleep [with anaesthesia] for purposes of an operation on one of his limbs. While he's submerged in a deep sleep, he feels nothing when they cut into his flesh. So, too, when a person's heart has been struck with “clogging of the heart,” he is stuck in a deep sleep and doesn't wake up even if his life is in danger!

Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe (20th Century, Germany & Israel)

The confession of *timhon levav* on Yom Kippur is actually the last in the series of confessions because it's the nail in the coffin, as it were. This is because "were it not for this **asleep-ness**, we could not stumble with all the other sins... We did not know, we did not sing - [rather] we sunk deep into the low depths of the world."

Rabbi Boris Dolin (b.1978), *Seeing Others - Kol Nidre 5772*

In essence, both Rashi and Rav Simcha see the danger of *timhon levav* as **living a life of numbness**. Whether we are in a deep sleep, or something is blocked so our life force has trouble flowing, we are going to lose something vital in our lives. When we sin, or when we are not fully attentive to our emotional and physical hearts, we can usually still get by each day. But we might end up being a little numb—numb to our own bodies and minds and numb to the values that we want to hold on to in our actions and our relationships with others.

The Chelsea Psychology Clinic Blog, Published 22 May 2020

At its core, emotional numbness is a coping mechanism. It's a way of shutting ourselves off from something that has been extremely painful or overwhelming. Sometimes this can be traced back to a specific traumatic event, other times it can be attributed to more of a gradual build-up of experiences which overwhelmed our ability to cope. Sometimes it happens simply because we were never given the tools - or permission - to understand and feel comfortable being with our emotions.

Although the experience might be one of emptiness, at the root of emotional numbness is the opposite - a barrage of feelings which have never been allowed the space to be experienced and felt.

Rabbi Doug Sagal, *Wake From Your Slumber! - Yom Kippur 5777*

Jonah would rather confront the storm and the tossing of the seas by slumbering through it all - and so he went down to the lowest part of the ship and went to sleep. One thousand years ago, a Spanish Rabbi named Yehudah ibn Bilam from Seville said that the story of Jonah is in fact our story - it's not about Jonah, it's about us. Many of us sleep through life - we sleep as life rages around us. Many of us treat our relationships, our life's purpose, and our attempts to be better than we are as if we are simply sleeping through it all. And when the captain says to Jonah - wake up - he is speaking to us, trying to shake us awake.