ASTORIA CENTER OF ISRAEL
Judaism With Open Arms

Kol Nidre: Reaching for Compassion

Rabbi Joshua Rabin, Astoria Center of Israel, Astoria, New York[1]

Kohelet 7:15	
…יֵשׁ צַדִּיק אֹבֵד בְּצִדְקֹו וְיֵשׁ רָשָׁע מַאֲרִיךְ בְּרָעָתֹו׃	Sometimes, good people perish despite their goodness, and wicked people live despite their wickedness.

Midrash Kohelet Rabbah 7:15	
וּמִפְּנֵי שְׁלֹשָׁה דְּבָרִים אָמַר רַבִּי יֹאשִׁיָּה הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא מַאֲרִיךְ פָּנִים עִם הָרְשָׁעִים בָּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה שֶׁמָּא יַעֲשׂוּ תְּשׁוּבָה, אוֹ יַעֲשׂוּ מִצְווֹת שֶׁיִּשְׁלֵם לָהֶם הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא שְׂכָרָן בָּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה, אוֹ שֶׁמָּא יֵצְאוּ מֵהֶן בָּנִים צַדִּיקִים...	Due to three matters, Rabbi Yoshiya said that the Holy One blessed be He is patient with the wicked in this world: Perhaps they will repent, or perform mitzvot for which the Holy One blessed be He will reward them in this world, or perhaps righteous children will emerge from them.

Midrash Kohelet Rabbah 7:16	
רַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן בֶּן לָקִישׁ אוֹמֵר, כָּל מִי שֶׁנַּעֲשָׂה רַחְמָן בְּמָקוֹם אַכְזָרִי, סוֹף שֶׁנַּעֲשָׂה אַכְזָרִי בְּמָקוֹם רַחֲמָן, וּמִנַּיִן שֶׁנַּעֲשָׂה אַכְזָרִי בְּמָקוֹם רַחְמָן…	R. Simeon ben Lakish said: He who shows pity when he should be harsh will in the end be harsh when he should show pity…

Mishnah Middot 2:2	
כָּל הַנִּכְנָסִין לְהַר הַבַּיִת נִכְנָסִין דֶּרֶךְ יָמִין וּמַקִּיפִין וְיוֹצְאִין דֶּרֶךְ שְׂמֹאל, חוּץ מִמִּי שֶׁאֵרְעוֹ דָּבָר, שֶׁהוּא מַקִּיף לִשְׂמֹאל. מַה לְּךָ מַקִּיף לִשְׂמֹאל, שֶׁאֲנִי אָבֵל, הַשּׁוֹכֵן בַּבַּיִת הַזֶּה יְנַחֲמֶךָ. שֶׁאֲנִי מְנֻדֶּה, הַשּׁוֹכֵן בַּבַּיִת הַזֶּה יִתֵּן בְּלִבָּם וְיָקֵרְבוּךָ, דִּבְרֵי רַבִּי מֵאִיר. אָמַר לוֹ רַבִּי יוֹסֵי, עֲשִׂיתָן כְּאִלּוּ עָבְרוּ עָלָיו אֶת הַדִּין. אֶלָּא, הַשּׁוֹכֵן בַּבַּיִת הַזֶּה יִתֵּן בְּלִבְּךָ וְתִשְׁמַע לְדִבְרֵי חֲבֵרֶיךָ וְיָקֵרְבוּךָ׃	All who entered the Temple Mount entered by the right and went round [to the right] and went out by the left, save for one to whom something had happened, who entered and went round to the left. [He was asked]: "Why do you go round to the left?" [If he answered] "Because I am a mourner," [they said to him], "May He who dwells in this house comfort you." [If he answered] "Because I am excommunicated" [they said]: "May He who dwells in this house inspire them to draw you near again," the words of Rabbi Meir. Rabbi Yose to him: you make it seem as if they treated him unjustly. Rather [they should say]: "May He who dwells in this house inspire you to listen to the words of your colleagues so that they may draw you near again."

Rabbi Shai Held, *Judaism is About Love*, page 1260
When we pity someone, we reach down to them, but when we show compassion for them, we reach across to them…In the first instance, we feel sorry for someone; in the second, we feel sorry with them. Pity is thus entwined with condescension, while compassion is enmeshed with equality and connection.

[1] All translations are from Sefaria, unless otherwise noted.