בס״ד

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Yom Kippur

ט׳ בתשרי ה׳תשפ״ז

Still In Your Hand

My board was covered in creatures. One player was already knocked out of the game entirely, and I was exactly one turn away from finishing off the last two. Then, out of nowhere, one of them played a card from his hand that instantly disabled every creature I had on the table.

This is what happened this past Shabbat when I was playing *Magic: The Gathering* with my friend Yonah Peikes and a few of his friends at his Yeshiva in Kiryat Ye'arim. For anyone who hasn't played the game, to put it very simply, you build up an army of creatures and other supporting cards and use them to knock other players out of the game until there's one player left standing. I'd already taken out one player, and by far had the biggest boardstate in the game. Everyone, myself included, assumed the fate of the game was sealed. But the second my board got shut down, the next player took the opportunity to take both of us out and win the game that just a minute ago had clearly been mine.

It wasn't the fact that I lost that gave me the idea to connect this to Yom Kippur. It's that the card was only effective because he took action and played it at the right moment, before the game was actually over. Just one turn later, and it wouldn't have mattered one bit.

That is like what the Neilah prayer on Yom Kippur is asking of us. Neilah is the final prayer on Yom Kippur, and the word itself means "locking" or "sealing." It's the most urgent stretch of the entire day, let alone the entire Jewish calendar. There's a feeling in the air that whatever the day has just been for you is about to be sealed for good.

But I don't want the lesson here to seem like it's that things can be taken from you at the last minute, like it could seem from my perspective during that game. It's more like what the

other player did: he had a move available to him, and the only part that actually mattered was that he played it before the game ended. Teshuva is like that card. It doesn't get played on its own; it's sitting there, waiting for you to actually use it. Rabbi Elazar says in the Gemara in Masechet Berachot that the gates of tears are never fully locked. I think that idea is at its strongest by Neilah, the moment when everything else feels like it's shutting for good. That's not permission to wait for the perfect last second on purpose. It's a promise for someone who's actually trying, even if it feels late. But just like that player did with the card, Teshuva requires action, not just feeling something. It has to actually show up as real change, not just a momentary emotion.

So by the time we get into Neilah at the end of Yom Kippur this year, I don't think the entire question is what's already been decided. It's whether we still play the move that we've been holding onto, while there's still time for it to matter.

Tzom Kal and Gmar Chatima Tova!

P.S. Thank you to Rav Shlomo again for reviewing my Dvar before I sent it out.