Slicha
Rabbi Dan Moskovitz
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When our family moved to Vancouver more than 12 years ago I acquired a new Torah teacher, its name is “Translink”. Everyday when I see a bus drive by me with the ever so Canadian message emblazoned in its digital screen above the driver, “Sorry, Out of Service” I am reminded of the significance of that seemingly “hardest of words” to my Judaism.

In Hebrew the word for sorry is *“slicha”* and it has also become one of the most oft heard and repeated words from and amongst Israelis since October 7th.

The word pierced the hearts of tens of thousands of people, not only Jews and not only in Israel, when Rachel Goldberg-Polin begged forgiveness from her son Hersh who had been taken hostage and then murdered by Hamas in the depths of the tunnels under Gaza.

With an emotional strength I cannot begin to fathom, she said in her eulogy of her son, “Hersh, at this time I ask your forgiveness. S’lachti, forgive me. If ever I was impatient or insensitive to you during your life, or neglectful in some way, I deeply and sincerely request your forgiveness. If there was something we could have done to save you and we didn’t think of it, I beg your forgiveness. We tried so very hard. So deeply and desperately. I’m sorry. Slicha”

Israeli President Herzog also said the word and with it he expressed the heartbreak of a whole nation.

“Beloved Hersh, with a torn and broken heart, I stand here today as the president of the State of Israel, bidding you farewell and asking for your forgiveness, from you, and from Carmel, from Eden, from Almog, from Alex, and Ori, and from all your loved ones.

I apologize on behalf of the State of Israel, that we failed to protect you in the terrible disaster of Oct. 7, that we failed to bring you home safely.

I apologize that the country you immigrated to at the age of seven, wrapped in the Israeli flag, could not keep you safe.

Rachel, Jon, dear Libby, and Orly, grandparents, and the whole family — I ask for your forgiveness, forgiveness that we could not bring Hersh back home alive.”

The power of that one word, “Slicha” / “sorry” is almost beyond words. To say you are sorry, and to truly mean it is to connect with another person on the most fundamental of human levels. When you mean it “I’m sorry” means you understand that what you did caused pain to another

person. That it was your fault, and you take responsibility. Sorry comes from a moral obligation, but it’s still a choice. A gift that is both hard to give and hard to receive.