

THE EQUILIBRIUM HOLIDAY

Rosh Hashana is the holiday of mixed emotions. It is a day of precise judgment, but yet a day of joy. A day to tap into our humility, while we celebrate it as a holiday. I always had a hard time figuring out what state of mind to be in, on Rosh Hashana. To cry, or not to cry? This was always for me a bottleneck of emotions. The Halacha is that I am allowed to cry only if I am brought to tears from the depth of feeling of my prayers. This is the only day of the year that even our tears have an instruction manual. What is all this emotional tightrope? Even in the blowing of Shofar, there is somewhat a mixture of G-d's Attributes. עלה אלוקים. בתרועה יקוּחַ בקול שופר (Tehillim 47 6) The Alshich points out that Elokim is the Attribute of Judgment, while YHVH is the Attribute of G-d's Mercy, which is activated when a person taps into Shofar, or שפרו מעשיכם, better your ways. What is the point of this "equilibrium"?

The Sefer Hachinuch explains for us the concept of Rosh Hashana. "It is from G-d's kindness toward his creations to judge and inspect their actions once a year, *in order* that they not sin too much, and that there be a place for kapparah... This day is the day that holds up the world, and that is why we make it a holiday. And because it is a day of judgment, it is appropriate to approach it with fear and trepidation more than any Holiday."

Rashi quotes the Midrash in the beginning of this week's parasha. "Why is it that the Parasha of Nitzavim (literally, standing up) is next to the curses and threats of Parashat Ki Tavo for those

who do not keep the Torah? Because after the Jews heard the 98 curses, and after they heard the 49 of Sefer Vayikra, their faces changed colors, and they said, Who can stand up to these?! Moshe calmed them and said, אתם נצבים היום You are standing today; you angered Hashem so much, and yet He still did not put an end to you, and you are all still standing..."

This is hard to understand. Wasn't the purpose of the curses and threats to warn Klal Yisrael to be careful to keep the Torah, every Mitzvah? What was Moshe doing calming them down, diminishing their fear, telling them they don't have anything to be afraid of? Why was he mixing up their emotions?

But the answer is that all that G-d wants is sincerity. He knows who we are, our backgrounds, our weaknesses and our tests. He does not ask of you more than you are able to do. But just one thing: Be serious about it. Once the Jews turned colors, Moshe knew that they were taking it seriously. And this is the purpose of the equilibrium. G-d has a place for Mercy, and that place is reserved for those who take Him and His Torah seriously. Not for the ones who say שלום לי כי בשרירות לבי אלך - יהיה לי כי בשרירות לבי אלך Peace will be to me, as I follow the dictates of my heart...

Every year, G-d creates the world anew. Rashi, on the first passuk, בראשית ברא אלוקים says that in the beginning, G-d wanted to create the world with His Name Elokim, the Attribute of Judgment. Rashi's

commentary is based on a Midrash Breshit on the words (in Bereishit), אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ בְּהִבְרָאָם, - *These are the creations of the Heavens and the Earth, when He created them. On the day that YHVH Elokim created the earth and the Heavens.* The Midrash says, “YHVH Elokim” - it is similar to a King that had empty cups. The King said, if I put hot water into them, they will explode. Cold water, they will implode. What did the king do? He mixed hot and cold water, and he put it into the cups and they remained undamaged. So, HKBH said, if I create the world with My Attribute of Mercy, there will be a lot of sinners. If I create it with the Attribute of Judgment, how can the world stand? Therefore, I am creating the world with a mixture of both Mercy and Judgment, and I hope it will last!

G-d's judgment is meant to prevent sin. The point of Rosh Hashana is that we take this day and think that even if we have sinned, we are happy *to be aware* that we have sinned, and we know what we have to work on.

Recently, a thought came to mind. The letters YHVH are a shortened version of יהיה הוה ויהיה He was, He is, He will be. What does this have to do with Mercy? The Attribute of Mercy is, in Hebrew, רחמים, Rachamim. The Abarbanel (Ki Tisa 34) says that the word רחמים comes from the word רחם Rechem. Womb. What does this mean?

G-d's Mercy does not mean that G-d just lets things pass. וייתור. He does so only with the logic of a womb. The womb symbolizes a place where there is no place. To make room for someone where there is no room for that person to exist. So

to, with mercy, G-d created room for the sinner to repent. How, exactly, does He do that?

The womb symbolizes that for the sake of the future, it is worth dealing with the present. Don't look at the present for what it is; look at it with the future in mind. Look at the good that is going to be born. G-d has patience with a person as he is, in the present, because He knows that this person has the **potential for growth and improvement.**

There are three ways G-d finds a place for a person who is, seemingly, undeserving. His past – he may have some merit in his past or from his parents. זכות אבות. His present- הוא שם. Even if he will be bad in the future, for now, he is good. His future - Moshe did not kill the Egyptian until he saw, with his Ruach Hakodesh, that nothing good was going to come out of this Egyptian. Being that G-d is היה הוה ויהיה – He is not bound by time. He is in the past, present, and future, all at the same time. G-d can see things for our merit that we may not see. That is why we cannot explain G-d's decision of לו רשע וטוב לו – צדיק ורע לו – why good things happen to bad people, or bad things happen to good people. This is an outcome of His מדת הרחמים, the Attribute of Mercy.

So, we say before blowing the Shofar, Alah Elokim bitruah, Hashem b'kol shofar. Elokim – His Attribute of Justice ascends with the truah blast; but His Attribute of Mercy, YKVK, ascends with the sound of Shofar, of improvement. The message of the Shofar is Shipru Maasechem, improve your deeds, and by doing so, G-d will reveal Himself as YHVH and find a place for you, even if you are not deserving, but in the merit of the new you of the New Year

THE SILENT WITNESS

Your best chance at judgment on Rosh Hashanah is to take it seriously. Rosh Hashanah is the time that G-d judges how much you value life as an opportunity to serve Him better. And the “impression” you make on Rosh Hashanah will be the New You for the New Year.

“You don't get a second chance to make a first impression”. Social science states that after the first 3 seconds, people you meet decided subconsciously if they like you or not. G-d gives you a week to decide what type of impression you want to make, and that will be the New You for the New Year. A lot is at stake during the next week. R. Moshe Shapiro, shlita, was quoted as

saying that Rosh Hashannah is the Rosh, the Head of the new year. The whole body is encapsulated in the head; the brain runs every part of the body. And your behavior on Rosh Hashana has control over your behavior for the coming year. The rest of the year depends on your RH performance.

Recently, I moved apartment in Bayit Vegan, Jerusalem. And when moving a family after 10 years, you have a lot of decisions to make. The most common of all decisions was what to throw away and what to keep. My wife and I concluded that the rule of thumb should be something I read in the field of maximizing space and organization. If you had no use out of the item for a whole year, you most probably could get rid of it. The space in your house has more value than the item. Don't waste space on things you don't need or on things that have little importance.

And then, I started shaking. I realized that is what Rosh Hashanah is all about. G-d decides on the upcoming fateful day who used his potential, and who was a waste of oxygen. G-d keeps us around to bring G-dliness into the world. G-d kept us around last year, for He decided, that we would fulfill a purpose to justify our being around last year. He believed in us. And now, there is judgment, to see if our merits outweigh our misdeeds. Just like an employer checks to see if his employee is bringing in more than is being spent on him. Is it worth keeping me around? Or do I get tossed out, *chas veshalom*?

But G-d saves the day. תקעו בחודש שופר בכסה ליום הגינו *Blow the Shofar in the (new) month, when (the moon) is covered for our holiday.* כי חק לישא-ל הוא , משפט לאלוקי יעקב *For this (day's) law is (a day) beyond logic for Israel. It is a judgement day for the G-d of Yaakov.*

Notice that Pesah and Sukkot are on the 15th of the month, Yom Kippur is on the 10th, Shavuoth, on the 6th, and only Rosh Hashanah is on the first of the month, when the moon is covered. בכסה ליום הגינו, "the holiday when the moon is covered". The moon is symbolic of the Jewish people, as mentioned in Birkat Halevana. The similarity between the two is that both the moon and the

Jewish people have times when their light is strong and full, and times when our light is weak - then, we are not noticeable. The Jewish holidays, Pesah and Sukkot, are when the moon is full, to commemorate the times when the Jewish people shone in its full glory. So, why is Rosh Hashanah on the day when it looks dark for us? When the moon is covered?

The Zohar says that on the day of Rosh Hashanah, when G-d is judging the world, the Satan levels his accusations against. "G-d! Your children have sinned!" G-d asks the Satan, "Who are your witnesses? My Torah says that I accept testimony only if there are two witnesses". So the Satan goes to the Sun, and brings him as a witness. For surely, the Sun can testify to all the sins of each and every Jew. And the sun testifies. And then the Satan goes to look for the Moon to be the other witness. But the Moon is out of sight! It is covered! The Satan has only one witness, when G-d's Torah requires at least two! This is why we are celebrating Rosh Hashanah, that the moon is covered! And this is why G-d judges us on Rosh Hashanah. (חלק ג' ער"ה / יערות דבש דרוש י' כ"ה אלול.) This is the only way we get out of the sticky judgment. And this is why we are not to mention our sins on Rosh Hashanah, so that there won't be another witness against us! The gentiles, who do not follow the Torah, accept one witness. So the sun is a witness against them, making judgment against them more difficult. But the Jews have this חק, this Torah law, that another witness is needed to get someone in trouble.

I wondered what this means, that the Moon is covered, so it cannot testify against us. Why can't the Satan find the moon? Can't the Satan see in the dark? Can't the moon testify, even if it is covered?

The answer is that the moon is not just covered. The moon has the power of renewal, and when the moon is covered, it is undergoing renewal. The secret of the Jewish people is that they are able to renew themselves. G-d judges us on Rosh Hashanah by the impression we make on that day, more than anything else. As the Shaarei Teshuva (1 41) cites the Yerushalmi, אם זך וישר היית לא

G-d tests how you are now. Rosh Hashanah is a time that you are in the process of renewal. And just as the moon is a different moon, you are a different person. The Satan cannot use the moon, the epitome of renewal, to testify against a nation of renewal. You are a new person, and the Moon knows that the testimony on the old you cannot be used against the new you.

There is one reason why I believe it is fair for me to ask for another year. Because now, I am a year

smarter. I have realized what my weaknesses are and what my strengths are. That is why, for a whole month, I am admitting sins, beating my fist against my heart, soul searching and thinking of my sins between the Shofar sets. Because I know that when I am coming into the New Year, I realize where I can go and where I can't. I realize what stresses me and what builds me. And I realize that without G-d, I am nothing.

Maybe, just maybe, G-d will give me another chance to be a better Jew!

SHABBAT SHALOM, YOSEF FARHI

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