

# NO FORGETTING BEFORE G-D

*by Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler and Rabbi Aryeh Carmell*

The Rosh Hashana service revolves around three central themes, one of which is "remembrance." What is the meaning of this idea?

The following talk was delivered by Rabbi Dessler in the Ponevezh Yeshiva in Israel, in the days preceding Rosh Hashana 1953.

We mistakenly think that when we forget an idea, the idea no longer exists. Actually its impression still exists in our brain, but it is no longer close to consciousness. When we concentrate on recalling a forgotten idea, it may return to consciousness.

Subconscious forces are at work in bringing an idea sometimes to the foreground, sometimes to the background of our mind. Knowing nothing of these mechanisms, we just call the process "forgetfulness."

Sometimes an idea is sent off to the background of our mind because it holds no importance for us. Our character traits may have led us to attribute little importance to the idea and thus relegate it to the background. A fact may be present to our conscious mind, though we are no longer aware of the steps which led up to its being there. We know immediately that "two times two equals four," and do not need to go through the steps by which we teach children this elementary fact: "Here are two apples; now if we add two more apples, how many are there," and so on.

Similarly, when we read a book, we do not need to identify first the consonants, the vowels etc. The word, or sometimes even the sentence, registers in our brain as a whole. This is because the habit of reading has so engrained itself on our mind that we do not consciously have to go through the particular steps in the process.

## FORGETFULNESS

In the course of time we forget our troubles. "Time heals all." This is because in his heart of hearts a person knows that his material problems are not all that important. They may have loomed very large at the time, but once the heat of the moment is over, one is prepared to be comforted.

The death of a loved one is different: Love is a spiritual matter and one would think that no consolation would help. This is why our Sages tell us that it is only by divine decree that the dead one is forgotten by the heart.

One of the subconscious activities of the Yetzer Hara (the self-destructive force that draws us away from God) is to hide from us the gravity of our sins and so prevent us from regretting them, and so possibly coming to repentance. People tend to forget their sins, but God will remind us of them soon enough. Even the smallest of sins are still there within us. We direct our attention away from them and this is what we know as "forgetting." Happy is the one who is aware of the gravity of his sins and the extent of his liabilities so that forgetfulness has no power over him.

## **MICROSCOPIC SCRUTINY**

An idea may be composed of many tiny parts, each of which is indiscernible on its own, just as in physical perception we see a hand, but in reality we are faced with innumerable microscopic cells. A person's motivation in doing a certain mitzvah may be almost perfect, but there may be a tiny admixture of an unworthy motive. This may be almost indiscernible, but it still forms part of the motivation of the act, and will one day be revealed by God, and for this too every person will be held to account.

Why? Because we could have discerned it. Had he only learned character development properly and set himself to acquire the "sense of-truth," had he worked hard to improve his character, he would have succeeded in creating in himself the "microscope" which would have enabled him to discern anything unworthy or corrupt, even to the tiniest degree. A person can sanctify God's name not only in his actions but also in every portion of his actions, even those not normally accessible to observation.

[On Rosh Hashana], when we say "There is no forgetfulness before Your heavenly throne," we mean that God's judgment will bring into account even those infinitesimal portions of our motives in which we are expected to sanctify God's name.

"...And nothing is hidden from Your eyes:" these are the eyes of God which "survey the whole earth." As the Zohar says, these are the "witnesses" which testify to human deeds. God's eyes testify to the smallest and least obvious.

"Human beings see by the eyes," and for human scrutiny it is difficult to discern that small admixture of evil. But "God sees by the heart," and to this scrutiny even the smallest point is visible.

## **SPIRITUAL VISION**

Since our spiritual vision has such difficulty in perceiving the ultra-small, God gave us the Torah, which can aid us to discern what would otherwise be beyond our reach. Torah is the absolute truth and its judgments penetrate to the ultimate verity.

[On Rosh Hashana we say]: "Who recalls good remembrances for those who bring Him to mind." That is, God is prepared to remember for a person even an infinitesimal amount of good that he may have done. But only for "those who bring Him to mind." That is, who try to remember Him, and who try to recognize the smallest points within their own soul and to bring them out into the light - which is

what we mean by "remembering."

One who does this to the best of his ability, and brings even the smallest point before God, attempting to rectify it as part of his service of God, is in effect "remembering" God - and in return God will "remember" him.

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