

# TRIAL PREPARATION

*by Rabbi Yehudah Prero*

Rosh HaShanah, the start of the new year, is almost upon us. The period during which the world is judged is about to commence. So that our fates for the coming year are sealed with a positive future in store, we must take stock of what we have and have not accomplished in the past year. Only once we have ascertained where we have excelled and where we are deficient can we make valid commitments to stay on the proper path, the path of G-d, for the coming year.

The Talmud (Kiddushin 81a) relates an incident that is full of lessons relevant to this season: Certain redeemed captive women came to the city of Nehardea. They were taken to the house of R. Amram the pious, (where they stayed in the upper level of the house) and the ladder was removed from under them. As one of the women passed by the opening between the attic and the house, a light fell on the house, illuminating the face of one woman. R. Amram seized the ladder, which ten men could not raise, and he alone set it up and proceeded to ascend. When he had gone half way up the ladder, he set firm his feet and cried out, 'A fire at R. Amram's house!' so that people would come to extinguish the fire, and thereby his desire would be quashed by the embarrassment he would suffer. The Rabbis came, thinking there was a fire in need of extinguishing. They reproved him, saying 'We have shamed you!' He said to them: 'Better that you shame Amram in this world than that you be ashamed of him in the next.' He then adjured it [the Evil Inclination] to go leave him, and it left him in the shape of a fiery column. He said to it: 'See, you are fire and I am flesh, yet I am stronger than you.'

One lesson we see from the incident is that all, regardless of the level of spiritual greatness attained, are tempted. The Maharsha, a commentator, writes following this incident that the greater the individual, the greater power the Evil Inclination has. However, to counteract the temptation to stray, the Torah acts as a shield and a savior. Temptation, desire and passion exist in each and every one of us. What separates the "boys from the men," so to speak, is whether or not we succumb to these urges. The Torah can protect us, as it protected Rav Amram. During this season, we can resolve to spend more time dedicated to the Torah and its precepts, so that when we are inevitably tempted, we will not concede.

The importance of safeguarding ourselves from ethically challenging situations is also highlighted by this incident. This incident follows a discussion in the Talmud concerning Yichud, the prohibition against a man and woman who are not married to each other remaining alone together. This seclusion, even in seemingly innocuous situations, can lead to compromising situations and sin. By extension, we should always be careful not to place ourselves in situations where we may err.

Furthermore, we should take positive steps to ensure that we will not fall victim to our own foibles. By committing ourselves to live a life of high ethical standards, taking the high road even when it is not the popular route, we demonstrate to G-d that we desire to live a true Torah life, and therefore should be given the opportunity to do so.

Rav Amram felt the best way to save himself from his peril was to cause himself embarrassment. He knew that any shame he felt in front of flesh and blood to prevent himself from sinning could not compare to the shame he would experience in the next world had he sinned. Rav Amram recognized that his dedication to G-d and His ideals as expressed in the Torah took priority over everything, including his own respect, honor, and esteem. It is this dedication and devotion that is at the center of Rosh HaShana. In the Rosh HaShana prayers, we make almost no mention of our asking for forgiveness on this judgement day. Instead, we spend the day proclaiming the monarchy of G-d, that G-d is the one and only King, that we are servants to the one and only Master. By affirming our status as subjects of the King of Kings, we are stating unequivocally that we will obey Him and His Torah, that our respect, honor and esteem are mere trivialities in relation to our obligations to G-d.

Even the best attorneys spend countless hours preparing for trial. These attorneys are representing their clients. Although their reputation might be affected by the outcome of the trial, it is the fortune of the client at stake. Yet, the midnight oil is burnt for many subsequent nights to ensure a positive outcome. Come Rosh HaShana, we are representing ourselves in the only courtroom that really matters. Accordingly, Hashem gave us the month of Elul for trial preparation. As Elul winds down, we should be diligently preparing for the case of our lives. Court will soon be in session, and the points that the incident of Rav Amram highlighted, among others, must be addressed. Now is the time when our preparation is in full swing. We should be fully formulating our defense, highlighting the positive and committing to rectify the negative. Assuming we do so, all will be well. We should all merit a satisfactory verdict, and a happy, healthy new year.

K'siva V'Chasima Tovah!