

A KINDLY GLANCE OR A PENETRATING STARE

by Rabbi Dovid Green

This week's parsha contains a declaration which deserves our attention. After a Jew has given all of the tithes and various gifts which he is obligated to give from his crops, he is directed to make a seemingly haughty and demanding declaration. "I didn't transgress Your commandments, and I didn't forget. Look from your heavenly abode and bless Your people Israel and the land which You gave to us." We direct our attention to the choice of words which the Torah chooses for the text of the declaration. (Hashkifa) "Look!" The great commentator Rashi, writes that the word "hashkifa" (look) is only used in connection with G-d looking down with intention to punish evildoers. The only exception is in our passage, where we beseech G-d to "look" down and bless us. What is the reason for the exception? Rashi quotes the Talmud which states that giving the obligatory gifts from our income changes G-d's anger to mercy. Since we have completed the tithing and distribution, we are capable of changing divine wrath to divine favor.

Rav Schwab points out that the same purpose would have been accomplished if we would just ask directly for G-d's kindness. Why must we use a word which is usually used in connection with something negative? We should just ask for something positive using a positive expression. Rav Schwab answers that the answer lies in understanding the text. The declaration we make is prescribed by the Torah, word for word. "I didn't transgress your commandments, and I didn't forget." Such a broad statement raises a few eyebrows. Not one transgression? I would like to meet such a person. Such a statement needs to be proven. The declarer knows that he would not make such a statement had it not been specified by the Torah. Hence he knows that on further examination of his spiritual account book he just might deserve the kind of "look" which is reserved for the negative. That is why the Torah chooses that expression. It recognizes our own knowledge of our shortcomings.

Nevertheless, we see from here that we have the capability to change G-d's "looks" from negative to positive. This is especially pertinent at this time of year when the day approaches that G-d judges the world. Rosh HaShana is the anniversary of G-d's creation of man. Each year He sets into motion the events and circumstances which the world needs in order to bring to fruition G-d's ultimate plan for the creation. Each year is a separate and unique unit in the process which brings out the ultimate goal of the creation. Every creature is a unique agent in carrying out that goal. Mankind is the only creature with the choice to willingly join in bringing about that goal, or ignoring his role in it. Despite a person's choice, he is always an agent in bringing out the goal, albeit in an unfavorable capacity. Take Pharaoh, for instance, who denied G-d's sovereignty, but despite his stubbornness, he was still

the agent through whom G-d revealed Himself in such tremendous proportions.

On Rosh HaShana, G-d looks at us individually and collectively. In what way did we as individuals work to bring the world closer to its goal? In what way did we do so as a nation? In what way did every country contribute? Based on the information which our past actions provide G-d with, we are given the new tools and circumstances with which to attain the goals of the new year. The new circumstances may manifest themselves in winning the lottery, or the opposite. They may involve health, children, happiness, sadness, pain, and pleasure.

The month of Elul preceding Rosh HaShana is traditionally a time of introspection and honest self examination. It is a time to take inventory of the good and bad in us, and think about who we would like to be next year at this time. G-d takes our seriousness and commitment into account in His decision-making process. G-d knows just as we do that we cannot change all at once if we want our changes to be lasting ones. He, however, examines our level of commitment to improve.

There are three things which cause G-d to "look" at us mercifully and even change harsh decrees to kind ones. Firstly, regret of wrongdoing and a commitment to improve. Secondly, sincere prayer. The third is charity. These are the things which paint us in a different picture and make us worthy of a blessed year to come. May we all take advantage of the great opportunity which we have in the weeks ahead, and may we all merit to be written and sealed for a good and sweet new year.

Good Shabbos!

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