

AFRAID TO MISS THE PARADE

by Rabbi Label Lam

You are standing today, all of you, before HASHEM, your G-d. (Devarim 29:9)

Two quick questions:

1) Why does Rosh HaShana precede Yom Kippur? Wouldn't it be a more merciful approach to first seek forgiveness and atonement and then face judgment? The determinations made on Rosh HaShana for livelihood and life itself would likely be improved if we had a chance to clean up our act before hand.

2) If Rosh HaShana is the beginning of the "ten days of repentance" then how come the Rosh HaShana Machzor is not focused at all on the subject of sins. Eating and celebrating seem to be a more important part of the day. Where and how is the repenting process taking place?

A story is told about a little shepherd boy who planted himself casually on the king's highway. Along came the king himself one day in his quadruple stretch limo and with the rest of his entourage. They came to a screeching halt in front of the shepherd who was absorbed in playing his flute.

The attendees honked the royal horns gently and then more and more furiously. beeeeeeeeeeeep-beep- beep- beep- bpbpbpbpbpbpbpb- beeeeeeeeeeeep (Sounds familiar?) but he turned a deaf ear. The servants were angered at his arrogance as the boy waved his hand uncaringly in their direction. They wished to flatten him at first but the king himself advised otherwise.

He told them to open the car door and invite him in. The boy now gladly took the offer to go for a cruise in such a fine vehicle. Unaware he was seated right next to the king he persisted in his insolent ways. He used inappropriate language and gestures. He pulled on the king's beard and toyed with his crown. The king silently tolerated the insulting behavior.

When they came to a little hamlet there were signs welcoming the king and a small number of fans shouting with glee, "The King!" The car slowed down and they waved in acknowledgment. The shepherd boy asked them to wait for a few moments so he could see the king everyone was clamoring for. The same scene repeated itself on a bigger scale as they made their way through a larger city. When they arrived at the "big city" there were millions of people were screaming, "The King!"

The shepherd boy became curious as to why they had confronted so many celebrations in one day and why there had been no other cars in each of the parades. It suddenly dawned upon him the

frightening fact that he had been sitting next to the king himself the whole time. He immediately fell with trembling to the feet of the king and begged for his life and for forgiveness. The king accepted his petitioning and pardoned him.

So too on Rosh HaShana, to the extent an awareness of "The King" is awakened in our minds to that degree we will have gained a light with which to view our lives. In this way the process of "teshuva" is first made meaningful. Obviously, we cannot express proper remorse until it becomes more clear to us than before in front of Whom we stand.

In this frame we can appreciate in L'Dovid (Psalm 27) why the sages comment, "HASHEM is my light" -this refers to Rosh HaShana, "and my salvation"- this is Yom Kippur. We look forward to an experience that will leave a taste of sweetness in our mouths the rest of the year, and for that reason and more most of us are afraid to miss the parade.

Good Shabbos!

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