

THE HIDDEN DAY

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BS"D
Volume 30, No. 50
28 Elul 5776
October 1, 2016

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Zvi ben Ben Zion a"h (Harry Greengart)

Today's Learning:
Nach: Divrei Ha'yamim I 21-22
Mishnah: Terumot 4:1-2
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Bava Metzia 4

There are two holidays mentioned in the Torah whose primary significance is not described there. Nowhere in the Torah is Rosh Hashanah described as the Day of Judgment. Likewise, Shavuot is not referred to in the Torah as the Day of the Giving of the Torah. Why?

R' Shlomo Ephraim z"l of Lunschitz (17th century; author of the Torah commentary Kli Yakar) answers by noting that there are two other dates that are hidden as well: the date of one's eventual death and the date of the arrival of mashiach. The reason for all of these is the same, says R' Shlomo Ephraim. Being in doubt forces us to think differently. Not knowing the date of the Giving of the Torah allows us to feel every day as if the Torah is new. Not knowing when mashiach will come can drive us to repent constantly in order to merit his arrival. Not knowing when we will die also can lead us to repent constantly in preparation for the Great Judgment. Finally, not knowing when the Day of Judgment (Rosh Hashanah) is prevents us from sinning all year long, when it is seemingly safe to do so, and planning to repent at the last moment. (Olelot Ephraim II 33)

Of course, we do know when the Day of Judgment (Rosh Hashanah) and the Day of the Giving of the Torah (Shavuot) are because the Oral Tradition teaches us these facts. Perhaps, suggests R' Menachem Simcha Katz shlita (Brooklyn, NY), the Torah is teaching us a second lesson: that without complete loyalty to the Oral Tradition and meticulous adherence to the laws found in it (i.e., in the Talmud), teshuvah is impossible or meaningless. This is alluded to in the blessing of the daily

Shemoneh Esrei which speaks of teshuvah: "Return us, our Father, to Your Torah, draw us close our King to Your service, and [then] return us in complete repentance before You." (Simcha L'ish p. 406)

"You are standing today, all of you, before Hashem, your Elokim: the heads of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, all the men of Yisrael." (29:9)

R' Levi Yitzchak of Bereditchev z"l (1740–1809; chassidic rebbe) writes: Hashem's Will is to pour kindness on the Jewish People. When we are worthy of His kindness, we permit His Will to be done. When we are unworthy, G-d forbid, we prevent His Will from being done.

R' Levi Yitzchak continues: Kabbalists call that which is Hashem's Will "panim" / "face" or "front," and that which is not His Will "achor" / "back." Thus, when Hashem is pleased with us, we say that He shines His "face" toward us. Likewise, our verse, "You are standing today, all of you, before Hashem, your Elokim," can be interpreted: "Because you are standing before Hashem, face-to-face, in front of Him, therefore He is your Elokim," with all the blessings that that relationship entails.

The Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 16a, quoted more fully below) instructs us to recite malchuyot and zichronot before Hashem. The instruction here likewise is that we crown Him and cause Him to remember us in a way that will allow His Will, i.e., His desire to bestow kindness upon us, to be done. (Kedushat Levi)

"I call heaven and earth today to bear witness against you: I have placed life and death before you, blessing and curse, and you shall choose life, so that you will live, you and your offspring." (30:19)

Rashi z"l writes: I show you these ("I placed life and death before you") in order that you may choose the portion of life. This may be compared to a man who says to his son, "Choose for yourself a good portion of my real estate," and then leads him to the best portion saying, "Choose this portion for yourself!" Concerning this, the verse says (Tehilim 16:5), "Hashem is my allotted portion and my share; You guide my destiny," i.e., You place my hand on the good portion, saying, "Choose this!" [Until here from Rashi]

If G-d has made the choice so clear, asks R' Yehuda Ashlag z"l (1886-1954), do we really have a choice? He explains:

Often, we are too harried to make good choices. When our Sages say that G-d directs us toward the correct choice, they meant that, from time-to-time, G-d gives us a break from the "rat race" and allows us the peace of mind to see clearly what is right. However, it remains up to us to use that opportunity to make good choices. (Hakdamah L'Talmud Eser Sefirot)

R' Yerucham Levovitz z"l (mashgiach ruchani of the Mir Yeshiva; died 1936) offers a different perspective: If Hashem takes us by the hand and says, "Choose this!" it would seem that man's

bechirah / free choice is being tampered with. Yet, our Sages teach us that we do have bechirah. It is incredible how far man's bechirah goes; so far that he is even able to ignore G-d when He shows man what to choose! (Da'at Torah)

From the Haftarah . . .

"I will rejoice intensely with Hashem, my soul shall exult with my Elokim, for He has dressed me in the raiment of salvation, in a robe of righteousness has He cloaked me, like a bridegroom who dons priestly glory, like a bride who bedecks herself in her jewelry. For as the earth brings forth her growth, and as a garden causes its sowings to grow, so shall my Master, Hashem / Elokim, cause righteousness and praise to grow in the face of all the nations." (Yeshayah 61:10-11)

R' Shlomo Kluger z"l (1785-1869; rabbi of Brody, Galicia) commented on these verses in a number of derashot.

In a derashah delivered in 5620 / 1860, he focuses on the first verse, which describes how Hashem has dressed us as brides and bridegrooms. He explains: Everyone knows that the most beautiful bride and the most handsome groom may not be so pleasing to look at beneath their fancy clothes and make-up. So, too, our repentance on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur may be little more than window dressing. Even so, Hashem takes pride in us as if we are his beautiful bride. This is part of His kindness to us.

In a derashah delivered the following year, R' Kluger focuses on the connection between the first and second verses quoted above. He says: The midrash says that we should shave and don clean clothes in anticipation of Rosh Hashanah because we are confident that we will be inscribed for a good year. But can we really be so confident? After all, many righteous people die in any given year!

The answer is that if a righteous person dies at a particular time, that must be what is good for him. Of course, we ordinarily cannot see how that is the case. Nevertheless, as the second verse above tells us, "As the earth brings forth her growth, and as a garden causes its sowings to grow, so shall my Master, Hashem / Elokim, cause righteousness and praise to grow." When a farmer puts seeds in the ground, they must first decay before anything can grow from them. One who knows nothing about agriculture thinks that the farmer is throwing away perfectly good seeds. But, we know better. Similarly, what seems bad to us, who do not know Hashem's ways, is actually good.

This is alluded to by the verse's use of the name Hashem / Elokim (i.e., the Name is spelled "yud-keh-vav-keh," but it is pronounced "Elokim"). The Name "Hashem" reflects G-d's Attribute of Mercy, while the Name "Elokim" reflects His Attribute of Justice. In reality, they are one and the same. (Kohelet Yaakov: Elul p.265-266)

R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935; Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael) writes: When a person engages in teshuvah mei'ahavah / repentance motivated by love of Hashem, he must forgive himself for all of his sins just as he is obligated to seek forgiveness from others against whom he has sinned. Once he is cleansed in his own eyes, a spirit of holiness will awaken within him that will turn his sins into merits. (Me'orot Ha'Rayah: Yerach Eitanim p.48)

"Recite before Me malchuyot / verses that acknowledge G-d as King, so that you will crown Me King over you. Recite before Me zichronot / verses that speak of G-d 'remembering,' so that remembrance of you will rise before Me for good. And with what? With the shofar!" (Rosh Hashanah 16a)

R' Yitzchak Yerucham Borodiansky shlita (Yeshivat Kol Torah, Yerushalayim) writes: From the context of the above passage in the Gemara, it is clear that our Sages view the recitation of malchuyot on Rosh Hashanah as akin to offering a korban / sacrifice to Hashem, through which one merits to be blessed on the Day of Judgment. One must understand that malchuyot is not a mere recitation; rather, it is a form of avodah / service, like the Temple service. Specifically, the avodah we perform on Rosh Hashanah is to accept Hashem as our King.

R' Borodiansky continues: R' Yisrael Salanter z"l used to say that it is possible for a person to crown G-d as King of the entire universe, as we say in the Rosh Hashanah prayers, "Rule over the entire world!" yet to forget to crown G-d as King over himself. However, the above Gemara teaches that the goal of malchuyot is: "Crown Me King over you!"

A korban that is missing a limb is invalid. Similarly, R' Borodiansky writes, if one accepts Hashem as King but holds back part of himself that he is unwilling to surrender to Hashem, his "acceptance," and therefore his offering, are invalid.

What is the message of the verses of zichronot? R' Borodiansky explains that their message is hashgachah p'ratit / G-d's Divine Providence over His People.

What is the meaning of the phrase, "With what? With the shofar!"? R' Borodiansky explains: On the one hand, the shofar instills in us fear and trepidation, for on this day our King sits on the "Throne of Judgment." At the same time, R' Ovadiah Seforno z"l teaches (in his commentary to Vaykira 23:24) that the shofar expresses our joy, for we know that, as a result of our prayers and our accepting Him as our King, Hashem "rises" from the "Throne of Judgment" and relocates to His "Throne of Mercy." (Siach Yitzchak p.163)