

JUDGING THE DAY OF JUDGEMENT

by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann

As the Yom Ha-din (Day of Judgement) approaches, our heart-strings are pulled tight as we contemplate the fact that on Rosh Hashana we will be judged on our conduct over the past year. This past month, Elul, we hope we have succeeded in reviewing and reassessing our priorities; the way we spend our hours and days. Much like the grant-applicant who does his best to justify his request for funding, we try to approach the Day of Judgement with a perspective that will assure Hashem granting us a year of health and prosperity, with all their implications.

In fact, the Torah does not single out Rosh Hashana as a day of judgement. Its source is found in the Talmud (Rosh Hashana 16a), "There are four times during the year that the world is judged... On Rosh Hashana all the inhabitants of the earth pass before Him like sheep [passing through a gate]." The Gemara (ibid.), however, quotes the opinion of Rabbi Yose that man is in fact judged every day, as it says (Iyov 7:18), "You inspect him every morning." Rabbi Nasan says he is judged every moment, as it says (ibid.), "... and observe him every moment!" Many commentators appear to understand that these opinions are not irreconcilable, yet how are we to appreciate the uniqueness of Rosh Hashana if we are judged every day and every moment of our lives?

The holy Ba'al Shem Tov was once walking in the street when he met up with Chaikel, the water carrier. "Chaikel, Shalom Aleichem, how are you?" the Ba'al Shem Tov inquired.

"Rebbe," he said, "things are not good. All my life I have earned an honest living carrying water, but now, as I get older, my body just isn't as strong as it once was. I come home in the evening exhausted. And besides, a person hopes to be able to retire when he gets older, yet here I am working just as hard, or harder, than I ever have. And how much do you think I bring home? Barely enough to make ends meet! Things just aren't as I might have liked them to be."

The Ba'al Shem Tov gave Chaikel his blessings that things should improve for him, and they parted ways.

A few weeks later, the two met once again in the street. "So Chaikel," the Ba'al Shem Tov inquired, "how have things been going lately?"

"Rebbe, Baruch Hashem, I can't complain. After all, all my life I've managed to live comfortably, if not

richly, by the work of my hands. We've never needed to borrow money from anyone, and we've never gone hungry. Even as I age, Hashem still gives me the strength to continue my work, which is exceptional considering my age and the weight of the cans I carry. Thank G-d, I have much to be grateful for. May Hashem only give me the strength to live out my remaining years in such health and good fortune."

The Ba'al Shem Tov turned to his disciples, who had accompanied him on each of his encounters with Chaikel. "Reb Chaikel just helped us to understand the meaning of the Gemara, which quotes one opinion that man is judged on Rosh Hashana, yet later cites opinions that we are judged every day and every moment. In fact, on Rosh Hashana we are assigned our allotted portions - the blessings of sustenance we will receive over the coming year. But during the rest of the year, there is a constant judgement as to how we will accept and perceive those blessings. One who merits will find himself constantly aware of Hashem's blessings in his life, and will rejoice in the opportunity to spend another day on earth enjoying Hashem's grace and kindness. At times, though, our hourly judgement goes awry. When we are in such a state, even the sweetest blessings and the greatest wealth fail to satisfy. On Rosh Hashana we ask Hashem that we should be blessed. And the rest of the year, we should pray that He give us the ability to feel it."

Parshas Nitzavim is always read the week before Rosh Hashana. This is most appropriate, because it contains the Parshas Ha-teshuva, a section of the Torah dedicated to repentance.

It will be that when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse... and you will return to Hashem, your G-d, and listen to His voice... Then Hashem will bring back your remnants, and have mercy on you. Hashem will remove the barriers from your hearts... and you shall return and listen to the voice of Hashem, and perform all His commandments. (30:1-8)

Having said that as a result of the chastisement, Israel will repent (verse 2), why does the Torah repeat the statement in verse 8?

There is an interesting "Catch-22" that pertains to teshuva. Teshuva is contingent upon the recognition that we have done wrong. But sin dulls our sensitivity to perceive that. So the more we sin, the more difficult it becomes for us to see it. How is one who has veered from the straight path to initiate the teshuva process? (Living Each Week)

Perhaps this is the function of Rosh Hashana. On the anniversary of the World's creation, Hashem declares a day of judgement and reassessment. The gates of teshuva and self-awareness are opened wide, and we are given the opportunity to view ourselves with the penetrating light of truth that descends to the very depths of our neshamos (souls). Once the gates of self-perception have been opened, the opportunity now exists to perpetuate that light with the daily/hourly/momentary

judgement that is supposed to be a constant force in our lives.

As the Days of Awe approach, we ask Hashem that He grant us plentiful blessings in the coming year, with the wisdom to perceive and appreciate those blessings, and the gift of self-awareness, that we may use our blessings to live a life of teshuva and ma'asim tovim.

Have a good Shabbos.

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