

JOYFUL SERVICE

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

And you will take joy in the good that He gave to you, G-d your G-d ... (Devarim 26:11) ... All this is because you did not serve G-d, your G-d out of joy and with gladness of heart while you had abundance. Therefore, you will instead become servants of your enemies, whom G-d will send against you ... (Devarim 28:47-48)

As the Yemai Noraim (Days of Awe) approach, and the situation of the Jewish people today is not great, these verses are perhaps some of the best mussar (positive criticism) we need to hear today.

On Rosh Hashanah, we are going to proclaim G-d our King, and try to become instilled with awe. We are supposed to try and "convince" G-d to change from the "Seat of Judgment" to the "Seat of Mercy," in order to be judged favorably in spite of our many transgressions. We do that by recognizing our shortcomings and resolving to improve in the upcoming year, accepting upon ourselves the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven.

On Yom Kippur, we are going to prove our resolve, just in case we have yet to do so from Heaven's point of view. We are going to try and prove that we plan to be loyal subjects of G-d by regretting our acts of disloyalty (sins), verbally enumerating them (viduy), and considering ways to avoid similar incorrect behavior.

Yet, when we are reflecting upon our previous year, and those before this year, and perhaps the entire history of the Jewish people, we must keep in mind the posuk above. We must consider whether or not we are guilty of the same mistake, and whether or not it is the source of our suffering today, personally and nationally.

Consider, for instance, the last fifty years of Jewish history. The Holocaust devastated the Jewish people, but the last fifty years witnessed a miraculous and remarkable national rebuilding on both sides of the ocean. While Israelis sacrificed much to build the country from swampland to world-class cities, the Torah world invested much to strengthen existing Torah institutions and to build new ones.

Meanwhile, in other parts of the world, fledgling Jewish communities worked day and night to put themselves on their spiritual and materialistic feet. Though anti-Semitism still persisted after the war,

still there was relative calm and tremendous opportunity to succeed, as is evident by what was accomplished.

In Israel, there were wars. The most famous was the Six-Day War, during which the tiny Israeli country thwarted yet another Arab attempt to push her into the sea, as was and is their mandate since Israel first declared statehood. Of course, the Jewish people once again gained access to the holiest place in the world and site of the past Temples, at least as far as the Western Wall.

However, not all wars were so "successful." Many people have died throughout the years and still continue to do so. In 1973, the Israeli state even came close to extinction after its short existence and it would have, had it not been for another LARGE miracle that dramatically turned the situation around.

Around 1982, the situation seemed to worsen more quickly. Starting with "Operation Galilee" during which the Israelis invaded Lebanon to dislodge the deadly Hizbullah terrorist cell from being within missile-reach of northern Israeli communities, world opinion began to turn against Israeli in a far more overt way. It was a sign of things to come, though most Jews did not want to accept that the most recent golden age of Jewish history might be coming to its end.

NEWSWEEK wrote that year rather boldly (paraphrased), "There must be a statute of limitations on the Holocaust; Israelis cannot continue to use it to justify all of their actions." All of a sudden, it seemed as if the world stopped fearing the specter of the Holocaust, once again revealing Jewish vulnerability at the hands of the non-Jewish nations. We have never since recovered world opinion.

I also recall, how even though Israelis insisted upon being identified as "Israelis," no matter whether it was for good or bad, the international media began to use "Jew" and "Israeli" interchangeably, and then mostly only "Jew." It seemed to tell Israelis and Jews all around the world that whatever happens in the Holy Land is not merely an Israeli thing, but a Jewish thing.

Now, here we are once again fighting to justify our existence and a war of attrition that has no apparent solution. Is there light at the end of the tunnel, or are we just feeling our way around the walls in the dark, hoping to stumble across a way out?

Will the situation spread beyond the borders of Eretz Yisroel and affect Jews outside the land where they live? That is the big question. Many say no, but they can cite no historical proof to back up their opinion, only hope. In the meantime, it is business as usual, and a matter of holding one's breath.

However, that is not the main point here today. The main point is that since the Holocaust, there has been a period of respite for the Jewish nation. In that period of time, we have experienced a tremendous amount of good and prosperity. Not every Jew is rich, and not all Jews are healthy. However, compared to the situation in pre-war Europe and past generations, we as a people have enjoyed good times.

What has been our response? Have we served G-d in joy? Did we use our increased physical

prosperity to enhance our spiritual prosperity? In some circles yes, and even then, only in some ways. While countless Jews have allowed their prosperity to act as a false sign that Heaven doesn't care what they do, or to become so busy that there is no time to think of G-d, others have remained loyal to Torah and mitzvos and have even beautified them, but have also stopped thinking about redemption and the ideal existence of Torah and mitzvos ON the soil of Eretz HaKedoshah - the Holy Land.

Even in the Holy Land, the Western Wall is not appreciated as much as it should be by the people who should appreciate it, or even Jerusalem for that matter. You will always find people who do, but Heaven likes majorities not minorities. And, if the Arizal is correct, and it would be safe to assume that he is, it is hard for us to appreciate the true beauty of Torah and feel grateful for it accordingly, if we remain only on the "revealed" understanding of its words and concepts.

Then, why are we surprised, as 5762 comes in, may it do so only for good, that the second half of the posuk is coming true in our time: Therefore, you will instead become servants of your enemies whom G-d will send against you . . .

All appearances aside, it is the Islamic world that carries the tune today. They are vast, wealthy, intensely committed, do not care about world opinion, and live in all major countries. With the exception of a handful, they do NOT like the Jews. Furthermore, they believe in earnest that we have no right to the land, and that it is just a matter of time until they take it away from us, G-d forbid. At least that is what the Arab broadcasters keep saying over and over, and over again.

The Jewish solution: Close your eyes and hope that the problem just goes away. The Torah solution: Take stock of the good that G-d has given to us. Recall it. Remember what He has done for us, even though we probably have not deserved it. I know I haven't deserved it at all. And, use that appreciation to light a fire of deep and profound appreciation in your heart, one that inspires you to seek out a closer and deeper relationship with the One who gave it to you, and continues to give it to you, while He is still WILLING to give it to you.

According to history, there may not be much time left to do so.

Shabbos Day:

Rosh Hashanah & Malchus, Part One

As it is well known, Rosh Hashanah is about Malchus, G-d's Malchus. Malchus means "kingdom," and history is about building the "Kingdom of G-d" here on earth. Rosh Hashanah is a crucial time for doing this, and reminding us of our mission for the ENTIRE year.

In a very real sense, what we are doing teshuvah for during the Yemai Noraim is not doing our part

of the "construction." Rather than looking after the concerns of Heaven, we have looked after our own desires, which is rebellion.

This does not mean that you cannot go to work, earn a living, and support yourself, or even take a vacation from time to time. It means that when you do, you do it with the intention of fulfilling the will of G-d, for what else is there?

Human kings have created a very negative stereotype. Usually loyal service meant making the king's life more pleasant at the cost of yours. If the king cared about his subjects, it was often out of fear of rebellion or fear of having no one left to serve him.

However, the King of Kings is not like that. He needs nothing and is perfectly self-sufficient. This means that He doesn't even need to be king for His sake, but rather for our sake; somehow, in making G-d king and proclaiming His kingdom down here on earth, WE achieve completion, not Him. It is ALL for us.

That is why we do not only refer to Him as "Malkeinu" - Our King, but as "Avinu Malkeinu" - Our Father, Our King. Even though we serve Him as a king, He cares for us as a father, receiving what we offer for our sake, and not His own.

Some of this is intuitive to mankind. We elect public leaders and even allow them to impose rules they make upon us, because we believe it is for our own good. We imbue them with power and allow them to live a higher standard of living on our expense account, again for our own good. This is why the word "melech" (mem-lamed-chof) - king - is made up of the same letters as the word "l'chem" (lamed-chof-mem) - "for you" (plural).

The system breaks down because the leaders themselves are only human, and far from being perfect. They are not omniscient or omnipresent, as G-d is. The power can corrupt them, and often does.

Furthermore, the people whom they lead trust them only so much, and are not always wise enough to know what is good for them. Furthermore, they are often unwilling to sacrifice the present for the sake of the future, even though their leaders know it is the need of the moment.

Thus, on Rosh Hashanah, as we return to G-d, Our Father, Our King, we return to ourselves as well. For, in proclaiming Him our king, we proclaim the kingdom of which we MUST be a part to achieve personal and national perfection.

SEUDAH SHLISHI:

Rosh Hashanah & Malchus, Part Two

That is the Pshat-Level - the Simple Understanding. Kabbalistically, we have the following:

The deeper meaning of the Omer-Offering that we bring up each year, from the day after the first day of Pesach until the holiday of Shavuot, is for the sake of building Malchus and for its completion. As the Arizal explains, this is the way that Israel rectifies itself in This World to become "holy to G-d" without any aspect of the "Other Side" (Sitra Achra). For, the tikun of the Malchus and Israel are the same thing: it is her structure and they are its limbs. It spreads to every Jew, and every rectification of Israel and their actions occur within it; they are the emanation of her spirit. (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 86)

The Omer-Offering refers to that which was brought up to the Temple, to thank G-d for the new harvest of that year. As the Mishnah in Rosh Hashanah says, Pesach was the Judgment Day regarding wheat and similar crops. Somehow at that time of year, something very Kabbalistic occurred through the mitzvah of the Omer-Offering that helped to rectify the Jewish people and build G-d's kingdom on earth.

The Leshem continues:

The offering of the Omer was to rectify the Divine Presence and Israel in This World each year. The main tikun, however, will occur in the future at the "end of days;" the redemption will begin on Pesach and end on Shavuot. Then the Divine Presence will have a complete revelation through the Jewish people . . . The Holy Divine Presence is called "Faith of Israel" for, only the Jewish people have faith that G-d is the King of the world, that He will rule forever, and that He made, makes, and will forever make all things . . . He alone does everything. All of this is the result of His holy light that emanates out from and dwells next to the Western Wall. From there it goes out and dwells amongst the Jewish people. This is the Holy Shechinah (Presence), Emunas Yisroel (Faith of Israel), K'nesses Yisroel (Assembly of Israel) which is called "Klal Yisroel." (Ibid, p. 87)

Believe it or not, all of this is summed up in the words, "Hear O Israel, the L-rd our G-d, the L-rd is One." For, in it is the succinct expression of our belief that the entire world belongs to G-d, that He pays attention to all aspects of creation, that He is involved in even the most mundane affairs of man, and that He is the Force behind all forces. To accept this concept is to be a member of the Kingdom. To live according to this is to build it.

This is also alluded to by the word "teshuvah" itself, which is spelled: tav-shin-vav-bais-heh. The final "heh" according to the Arizal is a reference to the final Heh of G-d's Four-Letter Ineffable Name: Yud -- Heh -- Vav -- Heh.

In Kabbalah, the Yud always corresponds to Chochmah in the Ten Sefiros, and the first Heh corresponds to Binah. The Vav corresponds to the six sefiros: Chesed, Gevurah, Tifferes, Netzach, Hod, and Yesod. The final Heh corresponds to Malchus.

When mankind sins, the Malchus of Heaven becomes less apparent, and the Heh is said to distance itself from the first three letters as it is forced to descend. The word "teshuvah" can be read in

Hebrew: teshuv-HEH, "return the Heh," which is precisely what we do when we recite the Shema, proclaim the Malchus of Heaven, and live by it.

MELAVE MALKAH:

Inadvertently, I skipped this section that should have followed Parashas Re'eh, which ended with: From the above two statements, it seems that there is a limit to how evil a Jew can become before he loses his portion in the World-to-Come. On the contrary, it seems as if not every Jew goes to the World-to-Come in the end. What, if any, is the resolution of these two points of view?

That will be the topic of next week's essay.

The section to follow was:

The answer is, though it may be that everyone comes to the World-to-Come (Sanhedrin 104b), it may be that not everyone has his own portion - a storehouse unique to him that he controls and enjoys forever - in the World-to-Come. Those without the required merit to own their own portion may merely "stand in the place of the many" (Rekanti, Shemos 33:19), being able to enjoy only the light reflected to them from the portions of others.

This would leave a big difference between those who serve G-d and those who don't; a big difference between those who only enjoyed "bread to eat and clothes to wear," and those who lived the lives of kings in This World" (Kadosh 60b).

In other words, those who lived a life that reflected their belief that life in This World is transient, and that the real living begins in the World-to-Come will be able to experience it first-hand. However, those who lived in This World as if they had already arrived in the World-to-Come - the life of a king - then they will be the "paupers" in the World-to-Come.

The goal of life in This World is spiritual striving, not physical pleasure. Physical pleasure is just a wonderful by-product that may or may not result from doing the right thing. It is also a way for G-d to test us to see if we have our priorities straight, to see if we're properly balanced between the physical and spiritual worlds.

The goal of the World-to-Come, on the other hand, is pleasure, spiritual pleasure, which is the ultimate pleasure, though we may not sense that here. However, there we will sense it, as the Talmud writes:

In the future, The Holy One, Blessed is He, will make a chupah for every tzaddik, each according to his honor. Each one will be burned by the chupah of his fellow . . . (Bava Basra 75a)

In other words, what you earn in This World is what you receive in the Next World. In This World, it is possible to "catch" your neighbor and even surpass his spiritual efforts. However, that ends once

free-will no longer exists which, of course, it won't in the World-to-Come. This is the idea of being "burned," that is, his portion can never be yours.

Nevertheless, one thing is certain: not one Jewish soul will be lost, as the Mekubalim explain:

In the future, all evil will be destroyed and all punishment will come to an end, and not one Jewish soul will be lost; all will merit Resurrection of the Dead and life in World-to-Come. (Kadosh 46b)

- based upon the Talmud and Rebi Akiva:

They [the Jewish souls] agree to the judgment pronounced on them, saying before Him, "Master of the Universe! It is good how You have judged us, good how You gave us merit, good how You found us guilty, good that You have made Gehinnom for the Evil and Gan Aiden for the Righteous." (Eiruvim 19a)

It is not enough that they agree to the judgment, but that they even accept it upon themselves! . . . When the Evil of Israel see the face of Gehinnom, they accept upon themselves the judgment of Gehinnom and break their hearts in teshuvah before The Holy One, Blessed is He, and with respect to them it says, "Close to Hashem are the broken-hearted . . ." (Tehillim 34:19). Then they are elevated and seated next to the Shechinah and they receive the reward for each transgression they had done [for which they did teshuvah and suffered], and they will be in the World-to-Come with the righteous and pious, and those who learned Torah and those who had faith. (Osios d'Rebi Akiva 8)

Among the many important points that come out of this, is that teshuvah has the capacity to return a person's portion to him while he is still living. However, if the person doesn't do teshuvah, then the only other option is tziruf v'libun. It's either one route, or the other, but whichever route the person takes in the end, teshuvah or tziruf v'libun, in the end every Jew gets his or her portion. (Kadosh 61a). This is the meaning of the following:

Every thirtieth day, Gehinnom turns them over here, as flesh is turned over in a pot . . . (Bava Basra 74a; Sanhedrin 110a)

The Torah has promised that all of Israel will live forever, even if one has transgressed the most serious sin of idol worship, for which the punishment is no portion in the World-to-Come (as the Rambam states in Hilchos Teshuvah, 3:6, which is based upon the Talmud in Rosh Hashanah 17a). Even still, punishment will clear them of this, and not one soul will be lost from Israel, as the Vilna Gaon writes B'Ederes Eliyahu (Nitzavim 18). (Kadosh 45b)

Truly, then, in the end, all of Israel has a portion in the World-to-Come, forever. The only question is, what will have to happen to a person between This World and the time to receive that portion?

* * *

There are many deeds a person can do in This World to merit his portion in the World-to-Come, but

some, apparently, to the rabbis of the Talmud stand out more than others. For example:

One who says the blessing "Redeemed Israel" before Shemonah Esrai in the Evening Prayer Service. (Brochos 4b)

One who says the prayer "Praiseworthy are those who dwell . . ." three times daily . . . (Brochos 4b)

One who says "May His Great Name be blessed . . ." (Brochos 57a)

A person's eulogy reveals if he is going to the World-to-Come (Rashi: Everyone cries much over him and speaks his praises). (Shabbos 153a)

One with whom the rabbis are pleased. (Shabbos 153a)

One who lives in Eretz Yisroel. (Kesuvos 111a)

All who ". . . They accord him honor in his old age" (Yeshayahu 24:23; Rashi: They give him honor in This World because of the wisdom of his years). (Bava Basra 10b)

All who learn halachah (Torah law) everyday is guaranteed a portion in the World-to-Come. (Megillah 28b)

No matter what their situation was on earth, not one Jewish soul will be lost, and all will go to the World-to-Come and receive a portion there. The basic difference between the Righteous and the Evil is a major difference. The righteous person will receive his full portion without any need for trial or suffering. An evil person, on the other hand, will have to go through tremendous spiritual "refinement" before receiving a portion of Eternity.

That is the ESSENTIAL choice a person is making in whatever conscious decision they make to do with life in This World.

Have a great Shabbos,
L'Shannah Tovah,
Pinchas Winston