

YOU'LL BE THE JUDGE OF THAT

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

Judges and law enforcers you must establish in all your communities which G-d, your G-d gives to you throughout the tribes; they must judge the people fairly. (Devarim 16:18)

Speaking of judges and judging, Rosh Hashanah (the Day of Judgment) is fast approaching. This Shabbos is the fourth of the seven Shabbotot of consolation between Tisha B'Av and Rosh Hashanah. Why seven? Because that is the amount of weeks there are between Tisha B'Av and Rosh Hashanah. However, the following midrash adds additional significance to the number seven:

When Adam sinned, the Shechinah departed to the First Heaven. The sin of Kayin forced it to the Second Heaven; the Generation of Enosh to the Third; the generation of the Flood to the Fourth; The generation of the Dispersion to the Fifth; Sodomites, to the Sixth; Egypt of Avraham's day, to the Seventh. Yitzchak arose and brought it (the Divine Presence) down from the Sixth to the Fifth; Ya'akov arose and brought it down from the Fifth to the Fourth; Levi arose and brought it down from the Fourth to the Third; Kehas arose and brought it down from the Third to the Second; Amram arose and brought it down from the Second to the First. Moshe arose and brought it down lower. (Bereishis Rabbah 19:7)

This certainly applies here, for Tisha B'Av to be the day of infamy that it is must also be the day of the greatest Hester Panim (hiding of G-d's face). Indeed, the Zohar explains that a different angel is appointed over each day of the year, and it is the Satan who controls the ninth day of Av (Zohar, Vayishlach). That represents the Shechinah being at the farthestmost level of Heaven, which is why it is such a dangerous time for the Jew.

However, regarding the month of Elul, we are told that it is a time that the Shechinah constantly moves closer to the Jewish people to encourage teshuvah. In fact, the name "Elul" stands for: "Ani l'Dodi v'Dodi li - I am to my Beloved and my Beloved is to me" (Shir HaShirim 6:3), revealing the intense relationship that is supposed to exist between G-d and His people, and that reaches a climax during the Ten Days of Repentance.

Therefore, it seems that the Shechinah moves from the highest level of Heaven to the lowest level over the course of the seven weeks of consolation. And, as much as Shabbos Nachamu implies that the consolation is complete and instantaneous right after Tisha B'av, the real reality is that full consolation cannot come until Rosh Hashanah, when The King has officially arrived.

This seems strange, since din (judgment) and consolation do not usually go hand-in-hand. As a matter of fact, it is just the opposite. They are usually polar extremes since a person has to live with the concern that he will be judged harshly, and the consequences that will follow in the upcoming year, if that is the case. What then is the consolation intended for the Jewish people after Tisha B'Av ends and Elul Zman begins?

SHABBOS DAY:

Yosef said to his brothers, "I am Yosef, is my father still alive?" But his brothers weren't able to answer him because they were in shock. (Bereishis 45:3)

Ostensibly, this is the meaning of the words of the Talmud:

The Holy One, Blessed is He, takes the hot sun out of its pouch, and the righteous are cured by it while the evil are judged by it. (Nedarim 8b)

In other words, consolation is relative to who you are, or rather, to what you have done. For those whom Tisha B'Av was a wake-up call to get back on track from a Torah perspective, each week until Rosh Hashanah, each week that the Shechinah comes closer, there is consolation. For, that is the essence of Jewish consolation - closeness to G-d. For the person who did not use the seven weeks between Tisha B'Av and Rosh Hashanah properly, there is none.

We learned this already from the story of Yosef and his brothers. When Yosef revealed himself to his brothers after having been missing for 22 years, they were speechless - dumbstruck. They had sold him on the belief that he was a threat to the future of the Jewish people, and therefore disliked by G-d as well. The fact that he was not only still alive, but second-in-command of Egypt as his dreams had predicted, testified to the depth of their error.

Nothing more had to be said. "I AM YOSEF" was not just a revelation but a fierce accusation, and not necessarily because Yosef meant it to be that way, but because that is the way his brothers took it. It was the only way they could receive it. For, as long as Yosef was missing, or at least not succeeding, there was room for rationalization, for justification, and for delusion. The brothers could believe that, in spite of their father's constant mourning, they had, in fact, done the will of G-d by doing away with Yosef.

Once Yosef stood vindicated before them just with the two words, "Ani Yosef," all the doors shut on his brothers, and the only thing left to do was to marvel at the phenomenal Hashgachah Pratis that had worked for Yosef, but against them. They had to own up to their error. Din had occurred before their very eyes and it brought no consolation to them.

However, imagine what it would have been like had the brothers seen the light long before Yosef revealed it. Imagine what the words "Ani Yosef" would have meant to them had they spent the

previous 22 years trying to recover him and make amends. And, imagine what would have been had they come to the conclusion that Yosef was righteous and destined for greatness. Finding Yosef at that time would have only been consolation and a reason for jubilation.

And thus, the rabbis make the comparison between the brothers' and the "Day of Judgment", and the final one for all of mankind, when G-d will only have to say two words: "Ani Hashem!" no more and no less - and judgment will be an automatic reality. For those who saw G-d as only man wants to perceive Him, and live their lives accordingly, Yom HaDin will be a great reward for a life of such devotion. For those who lived the lie, din will be anything but consolation.

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

Now, Israel, what does G-d your G-d want from you, except to fear G-d your G-d . . . (Devarim 10:12)

Thus it is with Rosh Hashanah. Rosh Hashanah has potential for tremendous consolation, the ultimate in solace. For the person who has been looking for G-d ever since Tisha B'Av, Rosh Hashanah is his or her reward. For the Jew who has been working on seeing G-d, Rosh Hashanah is the time that He can finally be "seen," His Presence becoming palpable.

That is what Moshe Rabbeinu was teaching in Parashas Aikev when he said:

Now, Israel, what does G-d your G-d want from you, except to fear G-d your G-d . . . (Devarim 10:12)

Asks the Talmud:

Rebi Chanina further said: "Everything is in the hand of Heaven except the fear of Heaven, as it says, 'Now, Israel, what does G-d your G-d want from you, except to fear G-d your G-d . . . ' (Devarim 10:12)." But is fear of Heaven a small thing? Has Rebi Chanina not said in the name Rebi Shimon ben Yochai: "The Holy One, Blessed is He, only has fear of G-d in His treasury, as it says, 'The fear of G-d is His treasure' (Yeshayahu 33:6)?" For Moshe, it was a small thing, as Rebi Chanina said: "An analogy can be made to a man who is asked for a big article and he has it, but to him it seems like a small article. If he is asked for a small article that he does not possess, it seems to be like a big article to him." (Brochos 33b)

However, this would imply that Moshe had minimized something important that he had mastered that others had not. At the very least, it would imply that he was out of touch with what was going on with the people with regard to the all-important trait of fear of G-d. Then, what does the Talmud mean?

It means that Moshe Rabbeinu was saying, "Look, attaining fear of G-d may be difficult to achieve and maintain, since it is one of six constant mitzvos, one of the mitzvos that a person is supposed to fulfill every conscious moment. But it is worth the effort: look how easy it is to serve G-d and perform the rest of the mitzvos once you have it. For, fear of G-d means seeing the world through the eyes of

G-d. And, from that perspective the mitzvos become as much of a personal imperative as eating or sleeping. That is why everything is in the hand of Heaven except the fear of G-d. For, that is all we have to do from our end of things for Heaven to take care of everything else."

That's what made Noach different from the rest of the people of his generation; Noach had fear of G-d. This does not mean that Noach lived in fear of punishment for sinning, refraining from acts he might otherwise have performed had G-d not been looking. It means that Noach saw sin as a waste of time, as a waste of life, as does G-d.

And how do we know that Noach had fear of G-d? Because, the Talmud says that wherever there is chayn, there is fear of Heaven.

MELAVE MALKAH:

G-d said, "I will destroy Man, whom I created, from upon the face of the earth; from Man until beast, to the creeping things, and the flying creatures in the sky; I regret that I made them." However, Noah found chayn (favor) in G-d's eyes. (Bereishis 8:7-8)

Now we can understand why Noach survived the Flood. It wasn't just that he had chayn, which often translates as "favor," for that is not a redeeming characteristic when the wrath of G-d waxes strong. However, fear of G-d is a redeeming characteristic, and the Torah is telling us by commenting on Noach's chayn, that he had plenty of fear of G-d.

What is the connection between the fear of G-d and chayn? It is very simple. Chayn is the outward manifestation of the inner soul. It is the inner beauty of a person revealed to the outside world through a person's attitude towards life, and the actions he performs. The pursuit of materialistic pleasures for their own sake shuts in the soul and the chayn it is meant to project.

However, Noach looked into the eyes of G-d for direction in life, that is, He looked at the world through the eyes of G-d, learning the Torah available to him at that time in history. It gave him spiritual x-ray vision, allowing him to see the invisible spiritual element of life enveloped by the very visible, very distracting physical aspect of Creation. It was as if he looked into the eyes of G-d and saw a mirror reflection of his spiritual self, chayn - Ches-Nun, being the reverse of Noach - Nun-Ches.

And there is more to fear of G-d than doing the mitzvos. That is the starting point. However, fear of G-d also means seeing the hand of G-d behind all that happens, and learning from it whatever lesson about life G-d might be teaching. If that proves to be too difficult, at least use the event as a source of inspiration to become more serious about life, because everything that happens is a message from Heaven, on some level.

This is what it means to walk with G-d. It means walking with G-d, literally. G-d is not only in a

synagogue, or at some other kind of spiritual experience. Every aspect of the fabric of life is imbued with the reality of G-d, otherwise it cannot exist. Holiness is a function of that reality, being so pervasive that the human mind can even grasp it and relate to it. The profane is the result of profaning the reality of G-d, G-d forbid, the result of using G-dliness to create that which actually hides His existence.

Rosh Hashanah is when the music stops. It is when G-d stops the clock on the game we call "Life," when our ability to either reveal or hide G-d in Creation is temporarily suspended, and the reality simply is. It is the time of year when G-d says, "I AM HASHEM," and we are forced to take stock of how real we were with the reality of G-d in all that we did. It is the time of year that we evaluate how much we "walked" with G-d, if at all.

For the righteous, Rosh Hashanah is a time of consolation, of vindication, when the less righteous are forced to come to the same conclusion that the righteous have lived with the rest of the year. But, for the less righteous the consolation is limited, for it is then that they realize the futility of a life that is inconsistent with the goals of Creation, as G-d defines them.

Thus, in the end, the consolation of these seven weeks is not a consistent national experience, but a relatively personal one, depending upon the direction a Jew moves during this time of year, and how much he goes in that direction. The Shechinah is coming towards us; how we will feel about its arrival is in our hands to decide.

Have a great Shabbos,
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Text

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