RABBI FRAND ON ROSH HASHANA

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Elul / Rosh Hashanah

On Rosh HaShana We Call Out To Our Father, Our King

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #694, Personal Tefilos on Rosh HaShana.

Parshas HaAzinu (which is the Shabbos after Yom Kippur this year) contains the famous pasuk [verse]: "He was like an eagle arousing its nest, hovering over its young, spreading its wings and taking them, carrying them on its pinions." [Devorim 32:11].

The Song of HaAzinu, written on the last day of Moshe Rabbeinu's life, describes, among other things, the relationship of the Jewish people to the Almighty. Rashi, on the above-cited pasuk, elaborates on the metaphor. The eagle is an enormous bird. Seen up close, it looks more like an animal than a bird, due to its size and power. The wingspread of an eagle is awesome! When an eagle returns to its nest and hovers over the little eaglets, it takes great care not to frighten the still young, immature, and fragile little birds. Out of compassion for these little birds, the eagle does not suddenly swoop down onto its nest. Rather, she bangs her wings against the tree branches so that the little birds know the mother is about to come, the mother is about to land. The little eaglets are forewarned. They can brace themselves and prepare themselves so that the eagle's landing will not damage them.

This is how the Almighty treats us. Ultimately, He is our father. There is an implicit paradox in the day of Rosh HaShanah, which is articulated in the words Avinu Malkeinu - He is our Father, our King. Our relationship with the Almighty on Rosh HaShana is expressed in these two almost paradoxical terms. He is both Avinu and Malkeinu.

"Our King" is a very scary concept. A King expects things from his servants. A King does not always tolerate infractions by his servants. That which will happen to us over the course of the next year will be determined over the course of the 10 days between Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur.

The Satmar Rebbe, zt"l, once made the following insightful comment on the pasuk: "Blow the shofar on the moon's renewal, at the time (the moon is) hidden (ba'keseh), appointed for our festive holiday"

[Tehillim 81:4] Rosh HaShana is the only Yom Tov on which the new moon is not yet visible. Since Rosh HaShana falls out on the first of Tishrei, the holiday is observed when the moon is hidden. The Satmar Rebbe gave a deeper meaning to the "hidden" aspect of Rosh HaShana. Namely, the fact that we will not learn what type of Rosh HaShana it was until the end of the year.

During the Ten Days of Repentance, people ask me, "Nu, how was Rosh HaShana?" My standard answer is "We'll see how Rosh HaShana was - much later in the year." On Erev Rosh HaShana, I try to comment to my wife, Thank G-d we made it! But we don't know ahead of time how our year is going to turn out. It is a very frightening thing. Not until right before sunset on Rosh HaShana can one know how the previous year turned out. Until then, it is "ba'keseh" [hidden]. This is the Malkeinu [Our King] aspect of Rosh HaShana.

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz once said that we may see an older person with a weakened immune system catch a cold in the middle of the winter and that cold develops into pneumonia that eventually kills the person. People attribute the cause of his death to an event which started on "Rosh Chodesh Shvat" and worsened on the 15th of Shvat until it eventually took its toll and killed him by the end of the month. Such calculations are incorrect. Rather, th older person caught the cold on Rosh HaShana. That is when it was determined what was going to happen later that winter. This is the awesomeness of the day of Rosh HaShana. This is the "Malkeinu" [Our King] - the justice the Almighty metes out as King.

But we must never forget that the Almighty is also Avinu [Our Father]. As Rashi says, He is like the eagle that has compassion and mercy upon its young. He is the father that loves us. There is no father in the world that loves his child more than the Almighty loves us. We tend to forget this.

I recently heard the foll owing true story: A father had a son who (as is all too often the case) was having problems during his teenage years. The son was not acting as he should and he gave his father much grief. In hope of putting the son on the right path, the father sent him to Eretz Yisrael with the hope that somehow in the Holy Land, the boy would straighten out. In Israel, the son visited a psychologist who had some success with the lad. The father visited the son that year and decided to go speak to the psychologist himself to hear first hand how his son was doing. The psychologist explained to the father that the problem he was having with his son could be traced back to unresolved issues that he (the father) was having with his own father.

The person heard what the psychologist said and understood it. But when he came back to America, he really did not act upon it. Several months later, however, a friend of the boy's father lost his own father and was sitting shiva. The father went to visit his friend who was mourner the loss. The mourner made the following comment: "I lost the person in the world who loved me the most. No one loved me like my father."

When the father with the problem son heard this comment, it stuck with him. He deeply wished that he could make a statement like that about his own father. He wished that he could feel he had a

father who loved him. He decided that the next time the Israeli psychologist came to America, he would make an appointment to see him together with his own father so that the two of them could try to work out their issues. And so it was. The psychologist came to America. The father went to his own father - a European Jew, a holocaust survivor - and said "I want to go with you to a psychologist." He explained, "Our relationship has suffered for years. Maybe we can do something to improve it."

Much to his surprise, the father agreed and thus the "grandfather" and the "father" went to the psychologist a nd had a session. At that session, when the "grandfather" began telling over his life story - the events that happened before, during, and after the holocaust -- how he was instrumental in saving members of his own family from death and so on -- the "father" suddenly had an amazing epiphany. He turned to his father and said "I never knew this about you! You are a hero! I never knew this. The only thing I knew about you was that I was afraid of you."

The "grandfather" turned to his son and said, "I love you more than anything else in the world." Those words that the son (now a middle aged man) was longing to hear his whole life, he now heard from his own father. This "father" then had an even greater epiphany and an even greater awakening: "If my father who is flesh and blood loves me that much, then how much more so does the Ribono shel Olam [Master of the Universe] love me!" This awakening changed the person's entire relationship not only with his own father, but wit h his Father in Heaven.

As we approach the scariest days of the year, when everything that happens to us during the coming year is on the line, as much as we should be in a mental state of awe and fear, let us not forget that He is not only Our King, but He is also Our Father. He is a Father that loves us and wants to take us back. He opens up His hands to us, just waiting for us to make the move. Seek out the L-rd when he may be found, call out to him when he is near to be called.

Like any father, He wants to take us back. He is just waiting for the son to say, "Dad, I want things to be better between us. I am sorry for the fact that I have not lived up to your expectations." Which father would not take his son back under those circumstances? The Almighty is a more compassionate and more merciful father than any father any of us ever knew. Let us not squander this opportunity to return to our Father in Heaven. He will have mercy on us, "like a father has mercy on his children."

May we all be written and sealed for a year of good family relationships, a year of prosperity, a year of health, and a year of peace upon Israel, and a year which marks the coming of the Righteous Redeemer to Zion. Amen.

This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion. The halachic topics dealt with in the portion of HaAzinu in the Commuter Chavrusah Series are the following:

Tape # 067 - The Mitzvah of Writing a Sefer Torah
Tape # 296 - Does Eating Mezonos Require a Succah?
Tape # 518 - Esrog Hamurkov
Tape # 694 - Personal Tefilos on Rosh Hashana

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