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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Coming Home

“And you will return to Hashem, your G-d, and listen to His voice... (30:2)”

I guess every family has its more and less religious members. My father was one of thirteen siblings and his father came from Birshenkovitz in the Ukraine. In the early years of the twentieth century my grandfather, his mother and his five sisters all left the Ukraine. I don't know if they all left together, but all the sisters and their mother, Yocheved, ended up in the US, and my grandfather in England. In the 1920s my grandfather and some of his sons opened a furniture factory that was very successful until the eldest son, Irving, died tragically in a car accident. Without him the business soon went into liquidation. Recently, with the wonders of email, the greater Spivack clan regularly swaps family history stories, and I recently posted the following: “My father (of blessed memory) once told me about a visit of Bobbe Yocheved's to England. She came to their furniture factory one Friday afternoon. There was a lumber delivery taking place. She realized that they were not going to be able to offload all the lumber before Shabbos came in, and so she told the transport company to reload all the lumber, take it back to the depot, and deliver it on Monday morning. They were flabbergasted, but she was adamant and got her way. I don't think that won her too many popularity bouquets from the lumber company, but I was impressed with the length that she was prepared to go to uphold her principles.”

A cousin of mine shot back, “Nice story about our great-grandmother. No wonder the business went bust!”

To which I replied, “Maybe it kept going as long as it did because of her principled action.”

“Maybe!” he replied.

My impression is that the Spivacks were quite religious, and that over the years it lessened – some more than others. Where there is no Torah learning, eventually there is no doing. In my experience, observance rarely extends to more than the following generation unless you can give your children reasons for our customs and observance.

“And you will return to Hashem, your G-d, and listen to His voice,” is both a command and a prediction. The command to return, to regain what we have lost, is written not in the command form but in the plain future tense – meaning that it's also a prediction. Hashem tells us that whether we want to or not, eventually we must return to Him. Even if we fail to do the job ourselves, there exists in the Creation a historical imperative: Eventually an era will dawn when the light of spirituality will infuse the entire world and pervade every soul.

THE OHR SOMAYACH FAMILY WISHES YOU AND YOUR FAMILIES “SHANA TOVA U'METUKA” — A GOOD AND SWEET NEW YEAR!

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Nitzavim: *Me'ila* 2-8

Integrity: The Inner Clothing

“If a person commits a betrayal and trespasses unintentionally with an item that is sanctified to G-d, he will bring as his guilt offering to G-d, an unblemished ram from the flock... for a guilt offering. And the value of his holy object of his transgression he will pay, plus he will add one fifth of its value to it, and he will give it to the kohen. The kohen will then make atonement for him with the ram of the guilt-offering, and the person shall be forgiven.” (Vayikra 5:15-16)

These verses are source-text in the Written Torah for the topic taught in our new *masecta* – *Me'ila*, the main source-text for this subject in the Oral Law. “*Mei'la*” refers to forbidden, personal (mis)use of *hekdesh*. *Hekdesh* is either something that has been declared by the owner to be brought as a sacrifice in the Beit Hamidash (*kedushat haguf*) or something a Beit Hamikdash treasurer may sell to receive funds for maintaining the Beit Hamikdash (*kedushat damim* for *bedek habayit*).

When considering prohibition and its punishment, a number of factors come into play, such as: the exact type of *kedusha* involved, the stage at which the transgression occurred (e.g., before or after *zerikat hadam* for a sin-offering peace-offering), and whether the transgression was intentional or not (*meizid* or *shogeg*). These and other *halachot* of *mei'la* are taught in this *masechta* as well as elsewhere throughout *Shas*.

While the above verses teach the atonement process and penalty for one who transgresses *me'ila* without proper intent, the punishment for one who transgresses with intent is lashes and payment of the amount of benefit derived from the *hekdesh*. The *azhara* (warning) in the Torah against committing this transgression does not appear to be explicit in the Chumash, but is a dispute in the writings of the Rishonim. (See Rashi and Tosefot in Sanhedrin 84a, and the Rambam in the Laws of *Me'ila* 1:3.)

The word *me'ila* appears to be somewhat mysterious in its appropriate translation, and how it differs from other words in *Lashon Hakodesh* that refer to theft – such as *gneiva* and *gzeila*. As we see in the writings of Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein (who authors the column in Ohr Somayach's publications called *What's in a Word?*), there are no synonyms in *Lashon Hakodesh*. Each distinct word has a distinct meaning. So what is the meaning of the word *me'ila*? Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch elaborates on its meaning in his commentary on Chumash, as follows:

The Hebrew word *begeg* means a regular person's garment. The word *begida*, from the same root letters as *begeg*, means “to be faithless.” Similarly, the Hebrew word *me'il* is the cloak of the *Kohen Gadol*, and the related word *me'ila* denotes being faithless in matters of holiness and *kedusha*. Therefore, just as *begeg* is the garment of an ordinary person and *begida* is a breach of trust in ordinary matters, *me'il* is the robe worn by the *Kohen Gadol* and *me'ila* refers to a serious breach of trust in sacred and priestly matters.

Another way to phrase this is that a person who is a *boged* (a faithless traitor) behaves as a “garment,” and a person who is a *mo'el* behaves as a “robe.” We are taught that the clothing of a person is a sign of his character traits. If someone puts his trust in another as a human being, and that trust is betrayed, the betrayer has shown himself to be merely the “outer garment” of a human being. Outwardly he has the appearance of a human being, but this appearance is merely a façade and a “mask.” Likewise is the case with someone who misused *hekdesh* and is *mo'el*. It is expected that a person should have an inner, priestly spirit that inspires him to act with great sanctity. If he fails to do so, he shows that is merely wearing a “priestly mask.”

This meaning of *me'ila* as being “faithless” or “deceptive” is supported by Chazal's statement later in our *masechta* (*Me'ilah* 18a). There we learn that the word *me'ila* in the Torah always means “*shinui*” – change or deviation. The word *me'ila* elsewhere in the Torah (*Bamidbar* 5:12 and *Divrei Hayamim* I 5:25) denotes the unfaithfulness of a woman to her husband and the unfaithfulness of the Jewish People to G-d. One who does an act of *me'ila* deviates from the behavior that is rightfully expected of him. Therefore, one who improperly treats “*Kodshei Hashem*” – the *hekdesh* items included in the verse in *Vayikra* that teaches about the prohibition of *me'ila* – is breaching the trust of his inherent inner integrity and sanctity.

- *Me'ila* 2a

Q & A

NITZAVIM

Questions

1. What is the connection between the verse "atem nitzavim" and the curses in the previous *parsha*?
2. Who were the wood-choppers and water-carriers?
3. Why can Hashem never "swap" the Jewish People for another nation?
4. One who ignores the Torah's warnings "adds drunkenness to thirst." What does this mean?
5. What two cities were destroyed along with S'dom and Amorah?
6. "The hidden things are for Hashem, our G-d, and the revealed things are for us..." What does this mean?
7. According to Rashi, how will the day of the ingathering of the exiles be "great and difficult?"
8. Where is the Torah not to be found? Where is it to be found?
9. When and where did the Jewish People become culpable for each other's sins?
10. How do the earth and sky remind us to keep the mitzvahs?

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.

Answers

1. 29:12 - The Jewish People asked, "Who can survive such curses?" Moshe responded, "You've done a lot to anger Hashem, and yet "atem nitzavim" – you are still standing before Him."
2. 29:10 - Canaanites who joined the Jewish People under false pretenses.
3. 29:12 - Because Hashem swore to their ancestors that He would never do so.
4. 29:18 - He causes Hashem to reckon his unintentional sins alongside his intentional ones, punishing him for all.
5. 29:22 - Admah and Tsevoyim.
6. 29:28 - There is collective culpability only for "open" sins, but not for "hidden" ones.
7. 30: 3 - It will be as if Hashem needs to take each individual by the hand and lead him out of exile.
8. 30:12-15 - The Torah is not found in Heaven, nor is it across the ocean. Rather, it is "very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart."
9. 30:28 - When they crossed the Jordan and accepted the oath on Mount Eval and Mount Grizim.
10. 30:19 - The earth and heavenly bodies, although receiving neither reward nor punishment, always obey Hashem's will. How much more so should we, who stand to receive reward or punishment, obey Hashem.

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ROSH HASHANA SPECIAL FEATURE

Awakening Mercy in Judgment

by Rabbi Chaviv Danesh

Chazal tell us that from Rosh Hashana until Shemini Atzeret there are different aspects of judgment that take place which determine one's upcoming year. Certainly, everyone wants to leave these holy days with a good judgment. With the High Holidays on the horizon, how can we increase our chances of a good judgment? Let's start with a seemingly peculiar statement from the Gemara.

The Gemara teaches: Rabbi Yitzchak says three things recall a person's sins: a person who walks under a shaky wall that is about to fall (or other dangerous places – Rashi); or one who is sure that his prayer will be answered because he had good concentration; or one who asks Hashem to punish someone because of what that person did to him. (Berachot 55a; Rosh Hashana 16b)

The commentaries explain that in all these cases the Heavenly Court analyzes his actions: to see if he is indeed worthy of being saved in a dangerous place, or having his prayer answered, or having his fellow punished for what he did to him. However, the commentaries also say that when his actions are scrutinized to see if he truly deserves these things, he may also get punished for any transgressions he has. Therefore, when a person does any of the three things mentioned in the Gemara, he may actually cause his own “book of actions” to be reviewed for any transgressions (see Rashi). For this reason, Chazal tell us to refrain from performing these actions.

At first glance, this idea appears problematic. What does it mean that the Higher Court recalls his sins? Hashem certainly doesn't forget in the first place! Also, why was his book of actions ignored until now? Finally, why do these three particular behaviors instigate punishments for previously overlooked sins?

Earning One's Reward

To begin, we must address some ideas about the purpose of the world's creation. Even though this topic is quite complex and deep, we will nevertheless attempt to give a very short and simplified introduction, which will help us address the above questions. Our Rabbis tell us that since Hashem is the epitome of goodness, and since it is the way of the good to bestow good, Hashem created the world to bestow of His own goodness to His creations. Since the ultimate good that exists in the world is Hashem Himself, it follows that the ultimate pleasure a person can attain is closeness to Hashem. This closeness to Hashem is the ultimate pleasure that awaits us in the World-to-Come. Human relationships are strengthened based on common goals, likes, personalities, etcetera. Likewise, the way to earn closeness to Hashem is through emulating Hashem's actions in as many ways as humanly possible. This is the purpose of the Torah and mitzvahs, which are given to us in this world to prepare us for the closeness we earn for the World-to-Come.

The reason why Hashem decided to give us this goodness only after earning it in this world, and not “for free,” is because goodness that is bestowed on a person without his earning it is not *perfect* goodness – and of course, Hashem does everything perfectly. Why wouldn't this be perfect goodness? Because when a person is given something for free he feels a certain amount of shame, which takes away from the ultimate goodness that Hashem wants to bestow. Therefore, Hashem requires a stage of our earning our place in the World-to-Come, rather than being given it for free (see Derech Hashem 1:2). (It is beyond the scope of this article to explain why Hashem didn't create us with a nature to not feel shame when being given things for free).

Contribution of Mercy

With this introduction, it follows that the purpose of this world is to earn our reward for the World-to-Come, and not be given it for free. However, we are still left with a question: How can there be *rachamim* (mercy) in this world? After all, by definition, mercy is something that is not earned but is out of the kindness of the one bestowing it.

The commentaries say that one reason for mercy in this world is to delay punishment to give the transgressor more time to do *teshuva* in this world. However, eventually everyone will be repaid in the World-to-Come exactly and precisely according to his deeds. Therefore, in the World-to-Come, everything we receive will be a result of our actions and it will be without shame. (See Mesillas Yesharim, *perek* 4, and Michtav M'Eliyahu, vol. 3, pp. 220-226.)

With this we can understand one reason why sometimes Hashem withholds His mercy. When Hashem sees that a person has reached a point where he is not likely to do *teshuva*, then mercy is removed. An example of such a case is a person who sees no faults in what he does. His pride and lust make him justify his transgressions, leaving him no room for self-criticism and, ultimately, no room for *teshuva*. For such a person there is no point of offering mercy.

Now we can understand the Gemara we started with. The commentaries point out that the three things mentioned all stem from a person's pretentiousness, and confidence in his actions, to the point where he doesn't see any reason why he would not get saved in a dangerous situation, or have his prayer unanswered, or shouldn't cause his friend to be punished in return for something he did to him. Based on this we can suggest that while Hashem never forgets anything, Hashem does sometimes deal with a person through mercy, and doesn't punish him immediately for his sins, to give him time to do *teshuva*. But for a person who sees no wrong in his actions whatsoever, the extra time granted through mercy for *teshuva* is not worth much. Therefore, Hashem takes His mercy away and now deals with him according to his actions, repaying him immediately for any wrongdoing. This is perhaps what the Gemara means when it says that these things can cause one's sins to be "recalled."

Awakening Hashem's Mercy

Since Hashem bestows mercy on us so that we may have more time to do *teshuva*, the way to merit a good judgment is by increasing one's chances of doing *teshuva*. How can one do that?

Firstly, one must learn halacha, since, after all, if one doesn't know that something is forbidden he won't do *teshuva* for it. Secondly, one must set specific times to constantly review his day-to-day actions to see if they are in line with the halachas learned and with what Hashem expects of him. Thirdly, one must also learn *mussar*, which will inspire and uplift him to live up to what he knows is the right thing to do without being distracted by his desires and the trivialities of this world.

In addition to the above one must also rid himself from haughtiness as much as possible, since this character trait leads to an instinctive reaction of justifying his transgressions and not accepting reproof. This is essentially a major deterrent to a person changing his ways and thus causing Hashem to remove His mercy from him. In fact, this is one reason why we say *viduy*, confessions of one's sins, because the first step to *teshuva* is accepting that one has performed transgressions, which will lead to *teshuva*.

With these aspects, one can increase his chances of *teshuva* and thereby increase meriting Hashem's mercy, through which one can have a favorable judgment. May we all merit making the most of this time, do *teshuva*, merit having a good judgment and ultimately see the coming of Mashiach, speedily in our days. *Shana tova!*

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Rosh Hashana

Q&A



Questions

1. Why do we blow the shofar during the month of Elul?
2. Where in the written Torah text does it tell us explicitly that the first day of Tisrei is Rosh Hashana?
3. We eat apples dipped in honey to symbolize a sweet year. Why do we choose apples above other sweet fruits?
4. What two blessings do we say before sounding the shofar?
5. Which Book of Tanach does the beginning of the Tashlich prayer come from?
6. What three barren women were "remembered" by Hashem on Rosh Hashana?
7. A person's yearly allowance is fixed on Rosh Hashana, except for three types of expenses. What are they?
8. We refer to the binding of Isaac in our prayers when we say: "Answer us as You answered Abraham our father on Mount Moriah..." What was Abraham's prayer on Mount Moriah?
9. Why, even in Israel, are there two days of Rosh Hashana, whereas other festivals in Israel are celebrated for only one day?
10. What halacha applies to the shehechyanu blessing on the second night of Rosh Hashana which does not apply on the second night of any other holiday?

Answers

1. After the sin of the golden calf, Moshe went up to Mount Sinai to receive the second set of Tablets on Rosh Chodesh Elul. On that day, the Jewish People sounded the shofar to remind themselves to stray no more after idol worship. Also, the sound of the shofar strikes awe into our hearts and inspires us to return to the ways of Torah. (*Mishna Berura and Aruch Hashulchan Orach Chaim 581*)
2. Nowhere. The Torah calls it "a day of shofar blowing." (This is one of many examples showing how our observance depends on the continuous oral tradition dating back to Mount Sinai). (*Bamidbar 29:1*)
3. Isaac blessed Jacob with the words: "The fragrance of my son is like the fragrance of a field which Hashem has blessed..." (*Bereishis 27:27*). The Talmud identifies this "field" as an apple orchard. (*Ta'anis 29b, Biyur Hagra*)
4. "Blessed are You... who has commanded us to hear the sound of the shofar," and the shehechyanu blessing. (*Orach Chaim 581:2*)
5. The Book of Micha (7:18-20).
6. Sara, Rachel and Chana. On Rosh Hashana it was decreed that these barren women would bear children. (*Tractate Rosh Hashana 10b*)
7. Expenses for Shabbos, Yom Tov, and the cost of one's children's Torah education. (*Ba'er Hetaiv Orach Chaim 242:1*)
8. He prayed that Mount Moriah should remain a place of prayer for all future generations (*Onkelos 22:14*). Also, he prayed that his sacrifice of the ram should be considered as though he had actually sacrificed Isaac. (*Rashi 22:13*)
9. Before our current exile, we did not have a fixed calendar as we do today. Rather, the Supreme Torah court in Jerusalem determined our calendar on a month to month basis. They did this on the first day of every month, based on witnesses testifying that they had seen the new moon. Therefore, the people outside Israel had insufficient time to find out the exact date in time for the festivals. The "two-day festival" arose to correct this situation. In Israel, however, the people lived close enough to Jerusalem to find out the exact date of all the festivals except Rosh Hashana. Since Rosh Hashana occurs on the first day of the month, even those living in Jerusalem sometimes needed to observe it for two days, if the witnesses failed to arrive.
10. On the second night of Rosh Hashana it is customary to wear a new garment or to have a new fruit on the table when saying the shehechyanu blessing. Thus, the shehechyanu blessing applies not only to the holiday, but to the new garment or new fruit as well. (This is done in order to accommodate the minority of halachic authorities who rule that no shehechyanu blessing be said on the second night of Rosh Hashana.) (*Taz 600:2*)

ASK!

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Blast It!

Esther S. from Miami, Florida wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

What did Sisera have to do with the Jews and the concept of 100 shofar blasts? What is the correlation between Sisera and the shofar blasts?

Dear Esther S.,

Sisera, the Assyrian general who fought the Jews, was killed by Yael as he fled the battlefield. The midrash tells us that Sisera's wicked mother cried one hundred and one tears when she heard the news of her son's death. We sound one hundred shofar blasts to counteract these tears which she shed in anger and pain at her son's defeat at the hand of the Jews. The one tear that cannot be erased is the tear shed out of pure love of a mother for her son.

According to the Sephardic tradition, 101 blasts are sounded. This is one more than the numerical value of the letters "samech" and "mem," which spell the name of the most harmful angel. Adding one gives us the numerical equivalent of "Michael," the name of the most "righteous" angel.

The Yemenite tradition is to sound only 41 blasts.

Hail to the Chief

Noreen from Darwin, Australia wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I am not Jewish and my boss is Jewish. I would like to wish him a "happy new year" but want to do it respectfully. How do I do this? Thanks.

Dear Noreen,

The classic greeting for the Jewish New Year is "Have a good and sweet New Year." By the way, the Jewish custom is to eat honey at the New Year to underline this idea!

National Holiday

Shannon Prissel from River Falls, Wisconsin wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

Do you think Rosh Hashana should be a national holiday in the United States? Why?

Dear Shannon Prissel,

I don't think Rosh Hashana should be a national holiday in the United States. When the Jewish kids get out of school on Rosh Hashana, while all their friends are in school, it makes the Jewish kids realize that they are special. The same can be said for Jews in a non-Jewish work environment; observing Rosh Hashana distinguishes them as Jews. In our age of rampant assimilation and intermarriage, making Rosh Hashana a national holiday might further weaken Jewish identity, removing what for many is the only practice that sets them apart as Jews.

Holy Day in Sourbay

Irene wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

What is the nearest synagogue inside or outside Indonesia for my colleague who is a religious person on a business trip which straddles Yom Kippur in Indonesia?

Dear Irene,

I'm sending you two addresses, both from Sourbay, Indonesia. They are taken from Jeff Seidel's Jewish Student Traveler's Guide.

- Synagogue Kajoon, 46 Djalan Kajoon. Phone: 31-545-2815
- Elias Nissim, 43 Gemanok. Phone: 31-577-770

Better Not Red

David Mercer from St. Johns, Newfoundland wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

We are a small shul without a rabbi. Last Shabbos the question was asked "Why does one not wear the colour red on Rosh Hashana?" Can you tell us? Todah.

Dear David Mercer,

Red symbolizes blood and Divine judgment (which may, G-d forbid, end with death). White symbolizes milk, goodness, sustenance and mercy. Therefore, on Rosh Hashana it is customary to avoid wearing red and to prefer white, in order that we will be judged with mercy and merit a happy and prosperous year. This is not a law, but rather a custom.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language
by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Rosh Hashana: A Tale of Two Beginnings

The Mishna teaches that on Rosh Hashana all the inhabitants of the world pass before G-d like the animals of a corral, and G-d passes judgment over the entirety of Creation. In this way Rosh Hashana is considered the Day of Judgment (*Yom HaDin*). However, Yom Kippur is also called the Day of Judgment. This begs the question: What is the difference between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur if they are both called the Day of Judgment?

Nachmanides explains that Rosh Hashana is the day of *din b'rachamim* (judgment in mercy) and Yom Kippur is the day of *rachamim b'din* (mercy in judgment). This cryptic distinction must be further clarified before we can fully understand how Nachmanides resolves the issue. In this essay we will focus on explaining why Rosh Hashana is the day of *din b'rachamim*, leaving our discussion about Yom Kippur for a different time.

As you probably know, Rosh Hashana (literally, “the Head of the Year”) marks the beginning of the New Year. However, besides serving as the first day of the New Year, Rosh Hashana has another role: It is the beginning of the month of Tishrei. It is like Rosh Chodesh. Rosh Hashana is both the beginning of a moon-related time (a month) and a sun-related time (a year). It is the first day of the year and the first day of the month. In this way Rosh Hashana represents the beginning of two cycles. Thus, it is the nexus of two opposing systems – of the sun and of the moon. The conflict between these two forces is highlighted by the concept of a solar eclipse, whereby the moon can block the light of the sun (a relatively rare phenomenon which Americans experienced a couple of years ago on Rosh Chodesh Elul).

As is well known, the Jewish calendar is neither solar nor lunar, but is a synthesis of both forms of keeping time. The months of the Jewish calendar are lunar-based because they are tied to the appearance of the New Moon, and the years of the Jewish calendar are comprised of twelve or thirteen such months. The year of the Jewish calendar roughly follows a sun-based system because the movement of the sun determines whether the year will have twelve or thirteen months. The purpose of adding a thirteenth month is to synchronize the seasons of the solar year with the lunar months. This intercalated month compensates for the discrepancies between the amount of days in twelve lunar months and the amount of days in one solar year. (Nowadays, we add a thirteenth month at set intervals: In a nineteen-year cycle, years 3, 6, 8, 11, 14, 17, and 19 have thirteen months, while the rest have only twelve.)

When we talk about the sun and the moon, there is an interesting dynamic which they represent. The sun and moon represent the concepts of “he who gives” and “he who receives.” The sun represents the idea of giving, as the sun gives off light, while the moon does not radiate from its own light. The moon inherently does not illuminate anything. Rather, the light that comes from the sun reflects off the moon and bounces into our eyes. It is really sunlight which appears to be the light of the moon. So the moon is not a giver. It is a receiver.

Another difference between the sun and the moon is that the sun always appears the same – it always looks like the same circle up in the sky. This is also characteristic of the giver. The giver constantly and reliably gives; there is no fluctuation or instability. In contrast, the moon plays the role of the receiver. Depending on the time of the month, there may sometimes be more of the moon visible, and sometimes less. In the beginning of the new month the new moon is but a small, barely-discernible sliver of white, but as the month progresses the moon waxes and waxes until it reaches its apex at the fifteenth of the Jewish month. At that point, the moon is visible as a full circle. Afterwards, it wanes smaller and smaller until the end of the month when it finally disappears and restarts its cycle with the advent of the next month.

In short, there are two major differences between the sun and the moon. Firstly, while the moon's image fluctuates throughout the month, the sun's remains stagnant and consistent. Secondly, the moon epitomizes the concept of the receiver, while the sun represents the giver.

In an esoteric way, the relationship between the sun and the moon can be looked at as a parable for understanding two seemingly conflicting methods by which G-d interacts with the world. There are essentially two basic ways in which He manifests His presence in creation: There is *din* (justice or judgment) and *rachamim* (mercy). The Kabbalists may sometimes use other terms to express these ideas, such as *duchra* and *nukva* – male and female, respectively in Aramaic – whereby the male force personifies the giver, while the female force personifies the receiver, *mashpia* and *mekabel* (influencer and influencee). But the meaning is always the same. Yet, what are these concepts of *din* and *rachamim* that G-d uses in running the world? How does He use these two opposing methods to run the world?

We can compare this to the case of two philanthropists. Two people donate tremendous amounts of money. The first man does not care to whom he gives money. He simply gives out

an indiscriminate amount of cash to all and sundry. The second philanthropist also gives money – perhaps even the same amount or more – but he requires any recipient to undergo a thorough vetting process. They must submit an application, meet with him, and explain to him their cause. Then, depending on how much he believes in their cause and what he feels is appropriate, he will give them a donation. The amount, of course, is based on what he feels the individual coming to him deserves. What is the difference between these two philanthropists?

The difference is in their *focus*. The first philanthropist focuses on the giver (i.e. himself), because it does not really matter to him who the receiver is and what he wants. He is simply giving away donations, whether or not the receiver deserves it. With the second philanthropist, the focus is on the receiver. Does he deserve a donation or not? Exactly how much? And so on.

With this in mind we can understand the difference between *din* and *rachamim*. Certainly, every element of Creation needs a constant flow of influence from G-d in order to continue to exist, but sometimes G-d might temporarily stop his influence or curtail it. Which way do we want G-d to act with us? Sometimes He acts with what we call *rachamim*, in which the focus is on the giver (i.e. Himself), and He gives an influx of His good to the world without any questions asked. But when He focuses on the receiver (i.e. us), that is called *din*, and under that rubric He also gives – but He also examines whether or not the receiver deserves His Divine influence, how much he deserves, when he deserves it, *et cetera*.

As mentioned above, the sun, as the never-changing celestial body that emanates light, represents a focus on the consistent, reliable giver. Conversely, the moon suggests a focus is on the receiver, because when the focus is on him the flow of goods can fluctuate depending on what the receiver truly deserves, just like the image of the moon fluctuates throughout the month. These two ideas of *din* and *rachmim* meet on Rosh Hashana. It is the meeting point of the solar year and the lunar month – the marriage of the sun and the moon, the *rachamim* and the *din*. It is truly the best of times and the worst of times.

In different places in the Bible we use different words to denote G-d. Sometimes He is known by His four-letter ineffable name (referred to as the Tetragrammaton) – which is often referred to as “Hashem,” which literally translates as “the Name.” And sometimes we refer to Him as simply *Elokim*, “G-d,” or *HaElokim*, “the G-d.” Tradition tells us that when encounter His four-letter name it alludes to His mode of acting through *rachamim*, while the word *Elokim* refers to G-d as the Divine Judge who metes out *din*. In fact, the word *elohim* sometimes appears in the Bible as a word that means a human judge. When we refer to Him as *Elokim* we mean to conjure His role as the ultimate Judge of Creation.

The contrast between these two characteristics is accentuated in Psalms 47, the chapter of Psalms that we read seven times before blowing the *shofar* (ram’s horn) on Rosh Hashana.

That passage discusses the universal recognition of G-d’s sovereignty, and one verse reads, “*Elokim* ascends with the *teruah*, Hashem, with the voice of the *shofar*.”

There are two types of sounds that the *shofar* makes on Rosh Hashana: a *tekiah* is a simple straight sound, while a *teruah*, on the other hand, is comprised of multiple short blasts together (there is a halachic uncertainty regarding whether they are 3 longer sounds, 9 shorter sounds, or 3 longer sound followed by 9 shorter sounds). A *tekiah* is one straight, consistent sound, while a *teruah* is a composite of several broken-up, fragmented sounds. In this way the *tekiah* represents the concept of *rachamim*, because when the focus is on the giver there is a consistent stream of giving. The *teruah* is related to the Aramaic word *rauah*, which means broken (like the expression that appears in the Talmud *sulam rauah*, a ladder with broken rungs). It represents *din* because it is not a constant flow but is separated and fragmented, in a manner consistent with whether the receiver deserves to receive or not. The *teruah* focuses on the receiver. We especially associate *Elokim* with the *teruah* because *Elokim* represents the *din* aspect of G-d’s administration of the world, while *tekiah* is associated with *rachamim*, and so it is linked to the name Hashem.

When we blow the *shofar* on Rosh Hashana, every *teruah* sound has a *tekiah* sound it before and after it. The *teruah* is always sandwiched by a *tekiah*. The idea behind this: although Rosh Hashana has the properties of *din* and *rachamim* (for it begins the solar year and lunar month), we strive to “hide” the *din* of Rosh Hashana. We say in Psalms 81, “Blow the *shofar* on (the first of) the month, on the hidden part of the holiday.” This alludes to the notion that the Rosh Chodesh aspect of Rosh Hashana is hidden, because we are trying to hide the fact that there is a *din* on Rosh Hashana. It is the concealed facet of the holiday. The *teruah*, which represents *din*, is something that we want to suppress, and so we hide it in between two instances of *rachamim* – the *tekiah* before and after. All that is visible from the outside of the sandwich is *rachamim*, not *din*.

This idea is known in Kabbalah as *mesikas ha’din*, “sweetening the *din*.” This is also the underlying principle at work when we dip the apple in honey on Rosh Hashana. Because honey is sweet, it too represents *rachamim*, and so we dip the apple in the honey to make the *rachamim* component of Rosh Hashana its dominant aspect.

But how does all of this work? Can we just close our eyes to the *din* of Rosh Hashana and then it won’t affect us? What are we doing by hiding from the *din*? Whom do we think we are fooling?

The answer, of course, is that we are trying to change ourselves for the better by changing the object of focus. If there is a judgment on us, then we are the object of focus, because G-d looks at us and judges whether or not we deserve His good. We do not want to be the object in focus because then we will almost inevitably be in trouble due to our sins.

To resolve this we do not talk about sins on Rosh Hashana. Instead we focus on G-d and His Kingship. Throughout the prayers of Rosh Hashana we continually speak about His greatness, His universal Kingship, and his power beyond words. In doing so, we switch the focus from being on the receiver to being on the giver, from being on ourselves to being on G-d. When the focus is on the giver, then the

rachamim paradigm is in play and G-d will give even without our deserving it. In this way Rosh Hashana is essentially the day of *din*, but is immersed in *rachmim* and sweetened on the outside.

- For questions, comments, or to propose ideas for a future article, please contact the author at rcklein@ohr.edu

PARSHA OVERVIEW

On the last day of his life, Moshe gathers all the people, young and old, lowly and exalted, men and women, in a final initiation. The covenant includes not only those who are present, but even those generations yet unborn. Moshe admonishes the people again to be extremely vigilant against idol worship, because despite having witnessed the abominations of Egypt, there will always be the temptation to experiment with foreign philosophies as a pretext for immorality.

Moshe describes the desolation of the Land of Israel that will result from failure to heed Hashem's mitzvahs. Both their descendants and foreigners alike will remark on the singular desolation of the Land and its apparent inability to be sown

or to produce crops. The conclusion will be apparent to all - that the Jewish People have forsaken the One who protects them in favor of powerless idols. Moshe promises, however, that the people will eventually repent after both the blessings and the curses have been fulfilled. And however assimilated they will have become among the nations, Hashem will eventually bring them back to the Land of Israel. Moshe tells the people to remember that the Torah is not a remote impossibility, but rather that its fulfillment is within the grasp of every Jew. This Torah portion concludes with a dramatic choice between life and death, with Moshe exhorting the people to choose life.

LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch
by Rabbi Yosef Hershman

Duty of Solidarity

One of the words used to refer to the Jewish community, *eidah*, stems from the root *ya-ad*, meaning destination. This root is phonetically related to *yachad*, meaning togetherness. Thus, the word *eidah* denotes people who have joined together for a common calling, and who are united by the solidarity of that calling: a community.

In this week's *parsha* we learn of the *duty* of solidarity, *avrut*. The extent of responsibility for our brethren is necessarily limited. Only that which is *revealed* – public acts of commission or omission – are the subject of this obligation of solidarity. By contrast, those sins committed in secret are left to G-d's governance alone. The unusual dots that appear over the words in this verse teach another limitation: the responsibility of solidarity takes effect only after the entry into the Land.

As long as Israel was journeying to the land of its independence, everyone's existence depended equally on the power of the Almighty. In essence, the exodus from Egypt still continued.

Israel was still within the process of the redemption, and the consciousness of solidarity of belonging to G-d was felt by all members of the nation.

However, when the last traces of the Egyptian exile would disappear, when the land that now-promised independence and prosperity would become theirs, the danger would then arise that the individual families and homes would become absorbed in their own interests. They might lose their sense of unity and purpose of a common Divine mission.

Thus, right before their entry into the Land, which will mark the beginning of an ordinary life of striving after livelihood and property, the people are commanded with the duty of solidarity. This ensures that each individual member of the community takes responsibility for the nation's eternal mission: solidarity of all for all, to ensure the faithful fulfillment of Torah.

Sources: *Commentary*, *Devarim* 29:28; *Shemot* 13:11,
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