**Parsha Potpourri**

**Rosh Hashana / Parshas Haazinu – Vol. 12, Issue 47**

**Compiled by Ozer Alport**

**ובכן תן פחדך ד' אלקינו על כל מעשיך (תפילת ראש השנה)**

In his sefer Matnas Chaim (Moadim, pg. 4), Rav Mattisyahu Salomon points out that it seems counterintuitive to ask Hashem three times a day throughout the year for life, sustenance, and health, yet on Rosh Hashana – the day on which the Books of Life and Death are open and we are judged in all these areas for the upcoming year – we make no mention of them in our prayers, instead focusing our supplications on asking Hashem to reveal Himself and rule over the entire world in all His glory. Wouldn’t it make more sense to petition Hashem on the Day of Judgment regarding our lives and our needs for the upcoming year, and then to spend the balance of the year beseeching Him to show Himself as we do on Rosh Hashana?

Further, the Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni Tehillim 855) teaches that Dovid prayed that after the Beis Hamikdash is destroyed and we no longer have a Temple and Kohen Gadol to atone for us, Hashem should instead accept the two prayers that still remain, those that we pray on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. Why does Dovid imply that the hundreds of Shemoneh Esreis that we daven throughout the year are meaningless, stating that all that remains are the prayers of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur?

Even more perplexing, Rav Chaim Volozhiner writes in Nefesh Hachaim (2:11) that just as a loyal soldier casts all his personal needs aside and focuses exclusively on increasing the glory of the king in whose army he serves, so too should we – as loyal soldiers in Hashem’s army – disregard our individual needs while praying and instead concentrate solely on our desire to maximize Hashem’s honor in the world through the universal acceptance of His dominion.

As proof, he notes that all our prayers on Rosh Hashana revolve around the theme of כבוד שמים (the honor of Heaven). He adds that although our daily prayers throughout the year appear to focus primarily on our personal needs, this is not the true intention of these requests, for the ultimate motivation behind every prayer is the pain that Hashem feels and the desecration of His honor that results when we suffer. In other words, Rav Chaim is telling us that our prayers on Rosh Hashana and our prayers throughout the year are essentially the same, and the only difference between them is the words we use to express ourselves. This is quite a chiddush (novel explanation), for at first glance, the two prayers appear to be completely different.

Rav Mattisyahu resolves these questions with a beautiful mashal (parable) to a rich king whose wealth was due to a monopoly he possessed on building materials, which required all contractors to purchase their supplies from him. The king was benevolent to all his subjects, particularly to one of the builders whom he drew close in his youth and raised in his royal palace.

One day, this contractor approached the king and told him that after reflecting upon all the kindnesses that the king had done for him, he wished to pay him back by building a magnificent palace in his honor. The king was obviously quite happy with this proposal, and he instructed the builder to take whatever supplies he needed from his royal store for the project. Each day, the contractor would go to the king’s store with a list of the items he needed for that day’s work, which the store employees gladly gave him for free. The other builders observed this scenario recurring day after day, and they demanded an explanation. When they were told that this contractor wasn’t building a project for himself, but rather for the use of the king, everything suddenly made perfect sense.

The nimshal (analogy) is that on Rosh Hashana, Chazal instructed us to concentrate on accepting Hashem’s kingship and proclaiming our desire to build Him a palace to increase His honor and glory. If we do so sincerely, Hashem rejoices and opens up His storehouses to give us the means – life, health, and financial stability – that we need to accomplish our goals. Along these lines, the commentators note that Elul is an acronym for (Shir Hashirim 6:3) אני לדודי ודודי לי – I am to my Beloved (Hashem), and my Beloved is to me. The Vilna Gaon explains that when אני לדודי – all my pleas are for the sake of my Beloved, then דודי לי – He will grant my requests and give me tremendous bounty and success.

Rav Mattisyahu adds that even when we do permit ourselves to ask for individual needs on Rosh Hashana, we quickly clarify that our intention in doing so is not our own physical pleasure, but solely to enable us to serve Hashem better, as כתבנו בספר החיים – inscribe us in the Book of Life – is immediately followed by למענך אלקים חיים – for Your sake, O living G-d, and שבענו מטובך ושמחנו בישועתך – satisfy us from Your goodness, and gladden us with Your salvation – is immediately followed by וטהר לבנו לעבדך באמת – and purify our heart to serve You sincerely.

After we have oriented ourselves on Rosh Hashana by declaring our wish to build a palace for the King, we then approach the King each day to tell Him – in the form of our weekday Shemoneh Esrei prayers – what we need to serve Him, which He is happy to give us since He recognizes that these requests are merely outgrowths of our stated desire to build Him a palace to increase His honor and glory.

With this introduction, we now appreciate the Nefesh Hachaim’s chiddush that our prayers on Rosh Hashana and during the week are really two sides of the same coin, for on Rosh Hashana we announce our plan for the upcoming year – to build a palace for the King – and throughout the year we return to tell Him each day what we need to continue our pursuit of this goal. From this perspective, we can also understand the Midrash’s statement that in the absence of the Beis Hamikdash, all that remains are the prayers that we daven on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, for these are the prayers that elevate us and set the tone for all our other petitions throughout the year.

As an illustration of this concept, the Meiri writes (Rosh Hashana 11a) that the story of Chana’s conception after years of not being able to give birth is read as the Haftorah on the first day of Rosh Hashana to show us the power of heartfelt prayer on this special day. However, the Nefesh Hachaim (2:12) points out that it is surprising to find Chana’s prayer described as (Shmuel 1 1:10) ותתפלל על ד', which literally means that she prayed *for* Hashem. Wouldn’t it have been more grammatically correct to say ותתפלל אל ד' – she prayed *to* Hashem?

Rav Chaim explains that Chana was on such a lofty spiritual level that her focus was not the intense anguish that she endured as a result of not having a child and being repeatedly taunted by Penina, but rather that this situation was causing Hashem pain, as the Gemora (Taanis 16a) teaches that עמו אנכי בצרה – when we suffer, Hashem suffers along with us. Although the Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni Bereishis 78) teaches that Chana was barren for more than 19 years prior to the birth of Shmuel, her only concern was that her plight was causing Hashem pain, so she prayed על ד' – for Hashem, asking Him to give her a child not for her sake, but for His, so that He should not have to suffer any more.

Chana added (Shmuel 1 1:11) that if her prayers were answered and she was granted a child after so many years of agony, she was not even intending to keep the child for herself to get nachas from him, but was going to give him over to serve Hashem all the days of his life. Just as the Vilna Gaon and Rav Mattisyahu prescribe, Chana’s focus in her Rosh Hashana prayers was על ד', and not surprisingly, her sincere and heartfelt prayer was answered with a son like Shmuel.

**היום יעמיד במשפט כל יצורי עולמים (חזרת הש"ץ מוסף דראש השנה)**

Due to the uncertainty that existed in the times of the Beis Hamikdash regarding the declaration of the new month, Jews today who live outside Eretz Yisroel keep two days of Yom Tov, while those who live in Israel observe only one day of Yom Tov. Rosh Hashana is unique in that it is the only Yom Tov that is universally celebrated for two days, even by Jews in Eretz Yisroel.

Rav Eliyahu Dessler (Michtav M’Eliyahu Vol. 2, pg. 74) points out that while it is understandable to observe an additional day of Pesach or Sukkos, which merely requires us to eat additional matzah or spend another day in the sukkah, the concept of a second day of Rosh Hashana, on which we repeat the same prayers and again declare היום יעמיד במשפט כל יצורי עולמים – all creatures of the world stand in judgment today – is more difficult to comprehend. Hashem and His Heavenly Court know which day of Rosh Hashana is the true Day of Judgment, and on that day they judge the entire world. Once that judgment has been rendered, what is left for them to do on the other day of Rosh Hashana, and in what sense can there be an additional Day of Judgment?

Based on the teachings of the Zohar Hakadosh (Pinchas 231b) and the Arizal, Rav Dessler explains that the two days of Rosh Hashana correspond to two different types of judgment that are meted out, one called דינא קשיא – harsh judgment, and the other called דינא רפיא – lighter judgment. On the first day of Rosh Hashana, each person is judged based on his individual merits and misdeeds. Although we tremble at the notion of the exacting judgment of Rosh Hashana, on some level, we assume that because we are still alive, we were obviously deemed meritorious, and we convince ourselves that we must be better off than we give ourselves credit for.

In reality, Rav Dessler explains that relatively few people are able to survive the strict judgment of the first day of Rosh Hashana. However, if these rare tzaddikim were the only people left in the world, they would have nobody to help them with their earthly needs, and instead of spending their time learning Torah and doing mitzvos, they would have to invest many hours each day tending to mundane issues such as growing food to eat and making clothes to wear.

Because Hashem wants these righteous individuals to remain free to serve Him, He arranges for other people to populate the world to assist the tzaddikim in meeting their needs, and this is the nature of the judgment of the second day of Rosh Hashana. After Hashem has determined on the first day who deserves to be inscribed in the Book of Life in his own merits, He then reexamines all those who were not found worthy in their own right and determines which of them deserve to serve as vital cogs in helping the righteous to function. Even though these individuals did not pass the strict judgment of the first day of Rosh Hashana, the lighter judgment of the next day gives them a second chance at life.

Rav Dessler adds that when the Beis Hamikdash stood, the Jewish people were on such a high spiritual level that they were able to survive with only one day of Rosh Hashana, for the presence of the Temple elevated them to the point that most Jews were so righteous that they could withstand the harsh judgment of the first day. In the event that Hashem recognized that the spiritual level of the nation had slipped, He would orchestrate circumstances to ensure that the witnesses for the new month arrived so late that there would be a second day of Rosh Hashana, which gave the people an additional opportunity to merit another year of life.

The leaders of the mussar movement taught that the best way for a person to prepare himself for Rosh Hashana is to help others and connect himself to the community, a concept which takes on new depth and significance in light of Rav Dessler’s insight. While the depth of Hashem’s calculations and judgments is far beyond our comprehension, understanding the nature of the two judgments that take place on Rosh Hashana offers us the opportunity to strive to connect ourselves to our communities and in particular to righteous individuals, and in the merit of doing so, we should all be inscribed and sealed for a happy and healthy sweet new year.

**האזינו השמים ואדברה ותשמע הארץ אמרי פי (דברים 32:1)**

In the beginning of Parshas Haazinu, the Midrash (Devorim Rabbah 10:1) cryptically asks whether it is permissible to treat somebody who is suffering from an earache on Shabbos. The Midrash answers that the Sages have taught that saving a person’s life takes precedence over the desecration of Shabbos. What is the connection between this Midrash and Parshas Haazinu? Secondly, what is the intention of the Midrash, as earaches are generally not life-threatening, and the law that one may desecrate Shabbos to save a person’s life is a more general rule not specific to earaches?

The Chasam Sofer explains the Midrash by noting that there is a legal dispute whether a person is permitted to confess his sins on Shabbos. Some maintain that it is permissible since it gives him pleasure to repent and atone for his transgressions, while others forbid it because the focus and emphasis on his misdeeds causes him anguish. Therefore, it is questionable whether it is permissible for somebody lecturing on Shabbos to rebuke the listeners. Even if he feels that they need to hear his reproof to inspire them to examine and improve their ways, doing so on Shabbos may be forbidden because it causes them pain.

However, on the Shabbos preceding Yom Kippur, commonly known as Shabbos Shuva, which has the power to rectify all of the Shabbosim of the previous year (Mishnah Berurah 603:2), the rebuke which the speaker gives is classified as pikuach nefesh (life-saving) and permissible according to all opinions. Proof to this may be brought from the fact that Tosefos writes (Menachos 30a d.h. mi’kan) that Moshe died at the time of Mincha on Shabbos. On his final day in this world, Moshe said the harsh words of rebuke contained in Parshas Haazinu. Because Moshe realized that this was his final opportunity to do so, he considered the admonishment to be pikuach nefesh which was allowable even on Shabbos.

We may now understand the true intention of the Midrash and its connection to Parshas Haazinu. In discussing a person whose ear hurts him, the Midrash doesn’t refer to a medical ailment but rather to a person who suffers anguish upon hearing words of rebuke. The Midrash questions whether it is nevertheless permissible to “cure” him on Shabbos by giving him needed words of reproof. The Midrash answers that although this question is normally subject to a dispute, in a case of pikuach nefesh – such as on Shabbos Shuva, when Parshas Haazinu is often read – it is certainly allowed, with the proof coming from the rebuke given by Moshe on Shabbos which is contained within the parsha.

**שובה ישראל עד ד' אלקיך כי כשלת בעונך (הפטרה – הושע 14:3)**

The Ponovezher Rav once traveled to South Africa to strengthen and encourage the Lithuanian Jews who had relocated there in their religious observance. Prior to his journey, he asked his teacher, the illustrious Chofetz Chaim, what message he should relate to the Jews there in the name of the leader of the generation.

The Chofetz Chaim replied that he should tell them that it is actually quite easy to do the mitzvah of teshuvah – repentance. The minimum requirements to fulfill this obligation are few and are within the reach of every Jew: ceasing to sin, expressing regret over one’s past actions, and accepting upon oneself not to transgress again. Unfortunately, the evil inclination attempts to convince a person that proper repentance is so difficult and involves so many complex components that he will never succeed in correctly doing so, thereby causing him to give up the effort without even trying.

In this vein, Rav Nosson Wachtfogel notes that in our verse, Moshe describes one of the commandments as not being hidden or distant from a person. It isn’t in the heavens or across the sea as one might have thought, but rather it is very close – in one’s mouth and heart. What is this commandment which a person might mistakenly conclude is so far beyond him that its observance requires him to travel thousands or millions of miles, yet in reality the keys to its performance lie inside of him? Not surprisingly, the Ramban writes that the mitzvah to which Moshe is referring is the mitzvah of teshuvah.

The Gemora in Kiddushin (49b) discusses a case in which a wicked man betroths a woman on the condition that he is completely righteous. Surprisingly, the Gemora rules that she may be legally engaged, explaining that perhaps he had thoughts of repentance in the moment prior to his proposal. We may derive from here that a person can literally transform himself from one extreme to the other in a mere moment of sincere reflection and regret, a lesson which should inspire and motivate us during the approaching Yamim Noraim.

**Parsha Points to Ponder (and sources which discuss them):**

1. The angel that informed Sorah that she would merit to bear a child promised that he would return to visit them later, at which time Sorah would have a child (Bereishis 18:10). Where do we find that the angel ever returned? (Tosefos Rid)
2. Was Yitzchok required to recite Birkas HaGomel (the thanksgiving blessing) after being saved from sure death at the Akeidah? (Machazik Beracha Orach Chaim 219)
3. The Gemora in Berachos (21a) derives from Devorim 32:3 that we are Biblically obligated to recite a blessing prior to the study of Torah. Is it permissible to study words of Torah with a person who has not recited the appropriate blessing beforehand? (Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv and Rav Asher Weiss quoted in K’Motzei Shalal Rav)
4. Rashi writes (32:48) that Parshas Haazinu is one of three places in which the Torah uses the expression בעצם היום הזה – in the middle of the day. It is also used in conjunction with Noach entering the ark and with the Jews leaving Egypt to emphasize that although others claimed they would prevent Noach from entering the ark and the Jews from leaving Egypt, Hashem commanded them to do so “in broad daylight” to prove that nobody can thwart His will. When the Jews heard of Moshe’s impending death, they claimed they would not permit him to die. Hashem commanded him to ascend the mountain and die in the middle of the day to prove that they were unable to stop Him. How did the Jews think that they could prevent him from dying, something which was beyond their control? (Yalkut Shimoni Parshas Chukas 764, Midrash Lekach Tov, Chiddushei Harim, Nesivos Rabboseinu, Yishme’ru Daas, Lev Avrohom and Imrei Shammai quoted in K’Motzei Shalal Rav, Ayeles Hashachar)

**Answers to Points to Ponder:**

1) The angel told Avrohom that he would return כעת חי'. Although Rashi understands this to mean that he would come back the following year at this time, the **Tosefos Rid** translates the expression as saying that the angel would return at a time when the child (Yitzchok) would need חיות – life. At the time that Avrohom raised his knife over Yitzchok to slaughter him at the Akeidah, Chazal teach that Yitzchok’s soul became so frightened that it left him. At that time, an angel called out to Avrohom from Heaven and commanded him not to kill Yitzchok, and at that point, Yitzchok’s soul returned to him. The Tosefos Rid suggests that the angel who gave this command to Avrohom was the very same angel who had told Sorah that she would have a child and promised to return at a time when the child was in need of life.

2) The **Chida** quotes his father, who maintains that Birkas HaGomel is said only by one who was placed in a perilous situation against his will, but not by somebody – such as Yitzchok – who was commanded to endanger himself to perform a mitzvah. Additionally, the Midrash (Pirkei D’Rebbi Eliezer 30) teaches that when the knife reached Yitzchok’s neck, his soul left him until it heard the angel’s command to Avrohom not to kill Yitzchok, at which point the soul returned. Since Yitzchok technically died and was resurrected only through a miracle, he was not able to say this blessing.

3) **Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv** was asked whether it is permissible to relate a D’var Torah to a Jewish taxi driver who hasn’t recited Birkas HaTorah. He permitted it, explaining that the driver doesn’t intend to fulfill the mitzvah of Torah study and therefore isn’t required to say the blessing. **Rav Asher Weiss** questioned this reasoning, as some opinions maintain that Birkas HaTorah isn’t a blessing over the mitzvah of Torah study, but is a blessing praising Hashem for giving us the Torah, which the driver should be required to recite regardless of his intention to fulfill the mitzvah of Torah study. He concurs with the ruling, but for a different reason. Birkas HaTorah is secondary to the actual Torah study, and it would be inappropriate to neglect the primary mitzvah because of an inability to fulfill a secondary one.

4) **The Brisker Rav** notes that Hashem commanded Moshe (32:50) to ascend the mountain and die there. Because it was decreed that Moshe must die on the mountain, the Jews could have prevented him from ascending and therefore spared him from death. This answer is supported by the **Midrash Lekach Tov**. The **Chiddushei HaRim** explains that the tremendous gratitude that they felt toward Moshe would have inspired them to pray to such an extent that it would have annulled the decree and literally been impossible to kill him. This answer is supported by the **Yalkut Shimoni**.

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