



MISHNAS CHAYIM

משנת חיים

MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

פרשת נצבים תשס"ח • Parshas Nitzavim 5768

THE U.N. IN THE SKY

As Rosh Hashanah fast approaches, we may be experiencing ambivalent feelings. In truth, the notion of contradictory emotions during this time is reflected in *halachah*.

FEAR OR FESTIVITY?

As the name implies, the ‘Days of Awe’ inspire a feeling of seriousness and even trepidation. This reaction corresponds to the nature of this day’s proceedings, as recorded in the Mishnah (*Rosh Hashanah 1:2*):

בְּרֵאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה כָּל בְּאֵי הָעוֹלָם עוֹבְרִין לְפָנָיו כְּבָנֵי מְרוֹן.

“On Rosh Hashanah, all of the inhabitants of the earth pass in judgment before Hashem, like sheep passing single file in review before the shepherd.”

Considering the fact that on this day, our fate is being determined — for life or death, peace or misfortune — it is not surprising that an awesome atmosphere prevails. As such, the joyous Hallel prayer, usually recited on a *yom tov*, is omitted on this day; as the Gemara explains (*Rosh Hashanah 32b*), “When the King sits on the throne of justice, with the books of life and death open in front of Him, is it appropriate that Yisrael engage in joyous singing?”

On the flip side, however, we do find that Rosh Hashanah is supposed to be celebrated in a joyous fashion like a regular *yom tov*. The Tur (*Orach Chaim sec. 581*) enjoins us to eat heartily on the *yom tov*, to don fresh, festive garments, and to take a haircut right before the day begins. All of this is done to demonstrate our happiness and confidence that Hashem will perform a miracle, and grant us a favorable judgment.

We seem to be left in a type of quandary: How are we supposed to *feel*?

This last citation is particularly perplexing for another reason. Although the Tur expressed a comforting thought, the question arises: How can we be so sure that things will turn out so smoothly? After all, isn’t this a day of judgment, where Hashem scrutinizes man’s deeds to decide on matters of life and death, prosperity and poverty? How can we be so certain of a favorable outcome?

In order to achieve a resolution of these issues, it is necessary to first examine what *really* goes on during Rosh Hashanah.

WAR

Of course, a major part of the day involves the judgment of all individuals, as mentioned above, wherein their fate for the upcoming year is determined. At the same time, however, there is a lot more that transpires in the Heavenly spheres, of which we may not have been previously aware. In Ha’amek Davar (*Vayikra, 16:29*), and Harcheiv Davar (*ibid., 23:24*), the Netziv portrays the goings-on of this day.

As has been elaborated upon previously in these pages (see *Mishnas Chayim, parshas Acharei, 5768*), the nations of the world are each equipped with a *sar*, which is a celestial ‘officer’ who advocates for the advancement of his nation. The state and affairs of any given nation on earth are intertwined with the positioning and activities of its representative in *shamayim* (e.g., the Persian/Iranian *sar* in the Heavenly Abode is apparently making a lot of noise). Only one nation does not have an angelic ‘ambassador’ amongst the cosmos: the Jewish nation, as the Gemara states (*Shabbos 156a*), “*Ein mazal l’Yisrael* (Yisrael has no representative

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celestial guardian; their affairs are handled directly by Hashem Himself).”

The ‘*Ein mazal l’Yisrael*’ concept carries with it some serious ramifications. The system described above, whereby Hashem channels His governance of world affairs through the ‘high officers’ of the nations, is known as *teva* (literally, nature; i.e., the conduct of the world through a ‘natural’ order). The *sarim* function as the big ‘*machers*’ within this system. ‘*Ein mazal l’Yisrael*’ states that the Jewish people are not a part of this ‘*teva*’ operation. Consequently, as far as the nations’ representative *sarim* are concerned, *Yisrael is not supposed to exist*. They therefore remain *adamantly opposed* to *Yisrael’s* continued existence (often violently so). We see that this sentiment trickles down to their ‘constituents’ here on earth.

The situation comes to a boiling point each Rosh Hashanah. During this period, the celestial officers of all the nations take up the battle cry against *Yisrael*, in an attempt to end their existence once and for all. Together, they gang up against the Jewish nation (sound familiar?). They plead their case before the *Ribono Shel Olam*, charging that the Jewish nation is deserving of only one of two fates: total annihilation, or mass assimilation amongst the nations. Either way, the end result would be the same: the extinction of the Jewish people, Heaven forefend.

‘TZVEI DINIM’ (DUAL DELIBERATIONS)

We have discovered that in actuality, there are *two* sets of deliberations that occur simultaneously on this Day of Judgment. One relates to the particulars of the personal lives of each individual. The other judgment concerns the Jewish people as a whole: will the Jewish nation continue to survive?

Despite the danger and grimness of the situation, R’ Shlomo Kluger (*Chochmas Shlomoh, Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim, 581:4*) sounds a positive note, citing a major difference between these two judgments. A positive outcome from the judgment of individuals is by no means guaranteed, as it is mainly dependent on one’s store of personal merits. The

second type of *din*, however, regarding *klal Yisrael* on a national level, is a different matter entirely. Here, Hashem has already provided numerous reassurances that no matter what, we will always remain His chosen people, and always continue to survive.

In fact, this distinction accounts for the ambivalent feelings manifest on this *yom tov*. Of course there is trepidation, as the personal fate of each individual hangs in the balance; the final decision remains hidden. When Chazal proclaim that we are confident of a favorable outcome, however, they are referring to the national *din* on the Jewish people. We have been promised by *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* that we will always emerge victorious from the battle waged against us by the celestial *sarim* in the Heavenly spheres. This reassurance is a true cause for *simchah*.

May we all be *zocheh* — individually and collectively — to a *kesivah vachasimah tovah*.

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