

Parshas Nitzavim-Vayeilech 5771

THE ROSH HASHANAH BATTLE

For many people, the atmosphere of this particular time period is marked by a certain measure of solemnity and fear. In light of the approaching judgment and the opening of the Books of Life and Death, these holy days are aptly known as the “Days of Awe.”

The familiar description of Rosh Hashanah as a day of judgment is related by the Mishnah, which states (*Rosh Hashanah 1:2*):

בְּרֵאשִׁי הַשָּׁנָה כָּל בְּאֵי הָעוֹלָם עוֹבְרִין לְפָנָיו כְּבָנֵי מְרוֹן, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: הַיּוֹצֵר
יַחַד לָבָם, הַמְבִּינֵן אֶל כָּל מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם.

“On Rosh Hashanah, all of the world’s inhabitants pass in judgment before Hashem, like sheep passing single file in review before the shepherd. As the verse states (*Tehillim 33:15*): ‘He fashions their hearts together and discerns all of their deeds.’”

WHAT’S SO SPECIAL ABOUT ROSH HASHANAH?

What may be less commonly known is that the matter is subject to dispute. As stated, the Tanna of the Mishnah singles out Rosh Hashanah as the day upon which man’s deeds are scrutinized and judgment is rendered. However, the Tosefta (*referenced in Rosh Hashanah 16a*) records the dissenting opinions of other Tannaim on this issue. According to R’ Yose, a person is judged every single day, while R’ Nosson contends that judgment takes place anew *every minute*.

There is a somewhat glaring issue that is raised by this Tannaic discussion: what, exactly is the nature and uniqueness of

Rosh Hashanah? This is obviously not a problem for the Mishnah, which contends that judgment is relegated to only one day per year – that day being Rosh Hashanah. However, at first glance it appears that for R’ Yose, every day is a virtual Rosh Hashanah – and for R’ Nosson, it is every moment! Is that special atmosphere of the “Days of Awe” something to be experienced year round?

In a more concrete sense, there are certain specific practices associated with the occurrence of judgment. One such example is the recital of *Malchiyos*, *Zichronos*, and *Shofros*, the Scriptural verses highlighting the aspects of Hashem’s Kingship, Remembrances, and the Shofar. This recital is undertaken in an effort to be found meritorious in judgment, as the Gemara states (*ibid.*): “The Holy One, Blessed is He, says (to the Jewish people): ‘Recite before Me *Malchiyos* (verses of Kingship), so that you will proclaim Me King over you; *Zichronos* (verses of Remembrance), so that your memory will arise before Me in your favor; and what will serve as the escort? The shofar.’” And so – asks the *Turei Even* (*Rosh Hashanah, ibid.*) – as these passages are recited to provide aid during the judgment process, they should be recited every day according to R’ Yose and R’ Nosson (who maintain that the judgment is an ongoing phenomenon)!

In fact, the implication of the Gemara seems to be that the *halachah* actually follows the opinion of the latter Tannaim! In short, a most perplexing picture seems to emerge from this discussion: If the “awesome judgment” is a daily occurrence, what is the significance and uniqueness of the day of Rosh Hashanah according to these opinions?

Harav Yeruchem Olshin explains the matter in light of a particularly eye-opening exposition from the Netziv. This classic dissertation on the essence of Rosh Hashanah has been dealt with previously in these pages (*Nitzavim 5768*) and is

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briefly revisited here to bring clarity to our discussion:

According to the Netziv (*Ha'amek Davar; Vayikra 16:29*, and *Harcheiv Davar; ibid., 23:24*), Rosh Hashanah is a monumentally eventful occasion – of a most serious nature. Aside from the judgment regarding the lives of individuals – itself an event of no small import – another caucus takes place, the outcome of which affects the Jewish nation as a whole.

BATTLE OF THE SKIES

It is no understatement (and should come as no surprise) that much takes place that is hidden from the view of mortals. On Rosh Hashanah, the celestial spheres are filled with activity. The angelic agents representing the various nations converge to do battle against the one nation that possesses no angelic intermediary – Yisrael. And as the Satan attempts

to raise accusations against each individual and highlight their misdeeds, these celestial representatives make their case against the communal body of the Jewish nation. They argue before the One Judge that there is only one of two acceptable alternatives for the fate of this people: either extermination or total assimilation. Either way, the goal is the same: to terminate the very existence of the Jewish nation as Hashem's chosen people.

As Jews the world over attend the synagogue on these Days of Awe, this frightening scenario plays out in the Heavens above. And it is this aspect that makes Rosh Hashanah a unique time of solemn judgment according to all opinions. In other words, the Tannaic dispute mentioned above concerns only the judgment of individuals: according to the Mishnah, this judgment takes place once a year, according to R' Yose – once a day, and according to R' Nosson – every minute. This judgment pertains to the fate of each individual, where his deeds determine into which book he is inscribed – for life, or otherwise.

All concur, however, that the other judgment event is time-specific to Rosh Hashanah. On this day, Hashem sits in judgment as the nations implore Him to abandon His people. But Hashem Himself has informed us how to counteract the designs of Israel's foes: through the verses and themes of *Malchiyos*, *Zichronos*, and *Shofros*.

It is for this reason, as well, that these verses are recited on Rosh Hashanah only – even according to the opinions of R' Yose and R' Nosson. They serve as the antidote against the communal judgment. The nations gather to wipe out our existence and deny our suitability as the people of Hashem. And so we demonstrate just the opposite: we loudly proclaim our acceptance of Hashem's Sovereignty, thereby affirming our allegiance to Him.

At certain points in history, the nations' attempts may have appeared to make some inroads, both physically and spiritually. But the more we strengthen our subservience to Hashem's Kingship, the more we block and reverse their advances. And the closer we come to the advent of the day when "all living creatures will proclaim, 'Hashem, the G-d of Israel is King... over all.'"