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Dovid *ben* Yeshayah *a”h*  
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of his *neshamah*

## Ideal Focus on the Day of Judgment

### PARSHAS NITZAVIM 5778

There is a familiar Mishnah that outlines different periods of Divine judgment occurring at various points of the year. Most of them are listed in a fairly straightforward manner, but a curious elaboration appears in connection with the judgment of Rosh Hashanah.

#### ***B’nei Maron***

This may be somewhat surprising, for the matter of judgment on Rosh Hashanah is a well-known entity: it is the time when man is judged whether to be included in the Book of Life or the Book of Death. Yet, from Chazal’s treatment of the subject it appears that the matter is not as simple as we might have thought. As the Mishnah states (*Rosh Hashanah 1:2*):

בְּאַרְבַּעַּה פְּרָקִים הָעוֹלָם נִדוֹן, בְּפֶסַח עַל הַתְּבוּאָה, בְּעֶצְרַת עַל פְּרוֹת הָאֵילָן, בְּרֵאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה כָּל בְּאֵי הָעוֹלָם עוֹבְרִין לְפָנָיו כְּבָנֵי מְרוֹן שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר הַיּוֹצֵר יַחַד לָבָם הַמְּבִין אֶל כָּל מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם, וּבְחָג נְדוּנִין עַל הַמַּיִם.

“During four periods (of the year) is the world judged: On Pesach (the world is judged) for (the allotment of) produce; on Shavuot – for fruits of the tree; on Rosh Hashanah – all the world’s inhabitants pass before Him (in judgment) like ‘*B’nei Maron*,’ as it states (*Tehillim 33:15*): ‘He fashions their hearts together and discerns all of their deeds’; and on the (Sukkos) festival, there is judgment for water.”

As mentioned, the treatment of Rosh Hashanah in this Mishnah stands out from the other periods. The Mishnah tells us that Pesach is for produce, Shavuot is for fruits, and Sukkos is for water; but when it comes to Rosh Hashanah, the matter is dealt with more elaborately and also somewhat enigmatically. What, indeed, transpires at this time? Isn’t it simply a time of judgment over life? And what exactly are these “*B’nei Maron*” of which the Mishnah speaks?

Regarding this last question, the Gemara itself addresses the issue (*Rosh Hashanah 18a*), providing three explanations of this unique term. All three seem to revolve around the idea of a single-file approach, implying a distinct judgment for everyone individually. But there are three different ways of translating the phrase, representing three ways of characterizing the single-file arrangement. In any event, the different approaches (based on Rashi’s rendering) are as follows:

1) “*B’nei Maron*” simply means “sheep” (which in Aramaic is “*amrana*”). The reference is to the tithing process, as the flock’s owner is obligated to designate a tenth of his flock for a sacrifice to Hashem. The manner in which he would do so was to lead all of his sheep single-file through a narrow opening and then mark every tenth animal as separated for the offering.

2) The reference is to a certain well-known location called “*Beis Maron*,” which featured a very narrow pass at a high altitude. On either side of this passageway was a steep cliff. As such, no two travelers could traverse it together; by necessity, they would have to walk single-file.

3) “*Maron*” is derived from the root-word “*mar*,” meaning “master” or “officer.” Thus “*B’nei Maron*” is a reference to the soldiers of Dovid Hamelech’s army, who would march in single-file.

Having established the basic meaning, then, we can now turn to the matter of its deeper significance. How do these descriptions relate to the whole subject of the day’s judgment? What was the Mishnah seeking to convey with this elaboration?

### **Personal Concerns Aside**

In his *sefer Avodas Dovid*, R’ Aharon David Goldberg presents an illuminating approach. He understands the three descriptions as representative of three different attitudes and approaches to the judgment of Rosh Hashanah – from the least to the most ideal.

The model of the sheep involved in the tithing process reflects an attitude (or lack thereof) adopted by the majority of the world’s population as it relates to the looming judgment. The sheep pass through one by one, some to be marked and designated for slaughter. But each one – including those that indeed are marked – is blissfully unaware of the significance of the proceedings. In a similar fashion, the entire world is scrutinized and judged by Hashem on this day; but of this voluminous number, there is only a very small percentage that is even aware of the sobering reality taking place at this time.

Then there is another group that is indeed very much aware of the judgment taking place and the seriousness of the hour. It is they who are compared to the travelers atop Beis Maron, who are quite alert to the peril that lurks on either side of them and thus proceed with great care. These individuals are very attuned to the prospects of either life or death and earnestly implore the Almighty to shield them from peril and grant them life.

There is yet another class of people who are similarly cognizant of the awesome judgment. Their approach, however, is of a more elevated nature. Rather than focusing on their own needs, their primary concern is for the glory of Hashem. (Indeed, this happens to be a recurring theme throughout the prayers of these *Yamim Nora’im* [Days of Awe]. Repeatedly, we express our longing for the dominion of evil to be removed and for Hashem’s greatness to be revealed and proclaimed throughout the entire world.) And in this way, such lofty individuals resemble the “soldiers of the House of David.” Entering into war, these soldiers also knew of the great danger that surrounded them, but that was not their main focus. Indeed, the Rambam writes that soldiers in battle are not even permitted to think about their wives and children (*Hilchos Melachim 7:15*). Rather, they effectively relinquish concern for their own lives and dedicate themselves solely and wholly to promoting the glory and honor of their king.

Thus we learn that the matter of the judgment of Rosh Hashanah is in fact not so “simple.” While it is true, of course, that man is judged for life or for death, it is also the case that this need not be his only focus. On the contrary, the ideal to strive for is to concern oneself more with the glory of the King of the Universe than with one’s own personal needs.

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