

## Rosh Hashanah 5768 Drush 2 - What G-d Judges us for on Rosh Hashanah

It's nearly four o'clock in the morning and Sadie wakes up to see her husband pacing up and down the bedroom floor.

"Moishe, come back to bed, it's not yet morning," she tells him.

Moishe replies, "I can't go to sleep. You know the \$10,000 I borrowed from our next door neighbour, Bernie. Well, it's due to be repaid tomorrow and I don't have the money. I just don't know what I'm going to do."

So Sadie gets out of bed and opens the bedroom window. "Bernie," she shouts on top of her voice, "Bernie, Bernie."

Finally a very tired looking Bernie opens his window and shouts, "You're crazy, Sadie. Don't you know it's nearly 4 o'clock in the morning? What the hell do you want?"

Sadie shouts back, "Bernie, you know the \$10,000 my husband owes you? Well, he doesn't have it."

Then she slams the window shut, turns to Moishe and says; ***"now you can go to sleep and let Bernie pace the floor."***

The Mishnah in Rosh Hashanah (1:2) states that on the Day of Judgment "All creatures pass before Him like Bnei Maron." The Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 18a) explains: Like Bnei Maron - IN BAVEL it was translated, 'like a flock of sheep' [Rashi - like lambs counted for the animal tithe, which are counted one by one as they pass through a small opening]. RESH LAKISH said: As in the ascent of Beit Maron [a textual variant reads 'Beit Choron': Rashi - a narrow pass where wayfarers had to proceed in single file, since the valley was deep on both sides]. RAV YEHUDA SAID IN THE NAME OF SHEMUEL: Like the troops of the House of David [Rashi - (which pass in review one by one) as they go out to battle].

When the Talmud offers multiple opinions, quite often it does not suggest that there is an argument, but there are multiple sides that can be looked at in the same coin. Here too, the Talmud is saying that each and every one of us is judged in three unique ways, which all make up the composite judgment of the person. So the Talmud is saying that G-d is judging us simultaneously in terms of being like sheep, climbers, and soldiers. What does this mean? Recently, I heard a beautiful interpretation of this by Rabbi Zev Leff, the Rabbi in Moshav Matisyahu in Israel.

Let us begin with sheep. Why does a shepherd count his sheep? There are many reasons. First of all, he wants to see if they are all there. Maybe some of them ran away and are no longer part of the flock. Even if they are there, he wants to see if they are healthy. He also wants to see if they have his brand, and are readily identifiable as to whose sheep they are.

Similarly, G-d is looking to see if we are still part of his flock, or if, G-d forbid, we have run away from him, and are not part of the flock. And if we are part of the flock – how healthy are we? What good deeds have we done in the past year? What character traits have we displayed in the past year? What kind of ideologies and beliefs do we have? Are we strong in our Mitzvah observance, do we do lot of good deeds? Do we learn Torah? Are we strong in our belief? G-d scrutinizes each and every one of us to see how healthy we are. More than that, do we wear his brand? We, as Jews, have to be more than moral and righteous in this world. All the nations in the world already have to be moral and righteous as they keep the 7 Noahide laws, which is basically to retain morality in this world. But that is not enough for us. We are called a "Kingdom of priests and a holy nation," which requires us to live up to a higher standard that serves as a light unto nations and a beacon to illuminate the darkness of evil that threatens this world. We have to be at the vanguard of ethical monotheism. We are G-d's ambassadors to the world. How do we represent G-d to the world? Everything we do, must reflect the G-dliness which G-d implanted within ourselves. We are "holy

sheep," that bear His brand, whose behaviour pronounces to the world that there is a G-d that benevolently rules this world. The kind of life we lead either bears testimony that there is a G-d in this world; or, G-d forbid, we do not bear His brand.

A story is told in the Talmud about Rabbi Shimon Ben-Shetach that sets a standard for Jewish sincerity in his dealing with his fellow Jews, non-Jews, and with *HaShem*.

It seems that, one day, Rabbi Shimon Ben-Shetach needed to purchase a donkey for traveling. He purchased the donkey from an Arab. At that time, neither he nor the Arab noticed that the donkey bore a small package in its saddle.

Sometime later, a student of the rabbi found the package and opened it. He was amazed by its contents. "It's a diamond, Rebbe. A perfect diamond. It must be worth an enormous amount. Sell it and you'll never want for money. Imagine all of the *mitzvot* you will be able to do with the new-found money."

Rabbi Ben-Shetach shook his head and responded, "I may be able to perform many *mitzvot* with the money, but they will never cancel the demerit that will be mine if I keep property that is not mine. No, I will return the diamond to its rightful owner, the Arab."

But the student responded, "Why not keep the diamond? The Arab will never know of his loss."

Rabbi Ben-Shetach responded, "But *HaShem* will know what I have done. I did not earn the diamond and so it is not mine." Rabbi Ben-Shetach was as good as his word and returned the diamond to the astonished Arab.

"I don't believe that anyone could be that honest," said the Arab. "The Jews must have wonderful laws. ***Blessed be the G-d of Rabbi Shimon Ben-Shetach.***"

Rabbi Ben-Shetach's strict adherence to common decency to his fellow man created a great *Kiddush HaShem* and should serve as an example for all to follow.

All this is part of the first aspect of judgment, that we pass before G-d as sheep before the shepherd to see if we are still part of his flock, that we are healthy, and that we bear His brand – that our lifestyle, values, standards, and goals in life reflect being part of G-d's flock. This first aspect corresponds to what is said during the first part of the Mussaf service – "Malchiyos – Kingship." Kingship requires us to be part of G-d's realm. Are we good subjects? Are we there? So the first aspect of judgment is: are we acting as a good sheep, which bear the brand of the king in his realm. At first blush, this seems to encompass everything – what more could be asked of us? But there are still two more aspects.

Theoretically, two people can be on the exact same state of being. Both of them can have the exact same amount of good deeds, the same amount of bad deeds, they can have the exact same character traits, exact same levels of belief in G-d, lead similar Jewish life-style, but one will receive a favourable judgment and one will receive a negative judgment. How could that be if they are exactly the same?

The answer is that G-d does not expect us to do good deeds, learn Torah, pray – ***and remain stagnant***. He expects us to grow constantly. A human being is called a "mehaleich" – a mover; whereas angels are called "Omdim" – stationary, who stand in one place. Angels are created to be who they are, and that is what they are. Animals are similar in this concept. The Hebrew word for animal is "Behaima." The Maharal explains the word to be a contraction of two words: "Bah" & "Mah" – meaning, whatever it is, is there. They don't change or grow – except physically. The animal is spiritually programmed; and whatever it is born with, that

is what it is. But a human being has to grow and constantly move. Life is analogous to climbing up the downward escalator. If you stand still on the escalator – you will go down. So too is life in this world. You can not stand still and stagnate – you must constantly be growing. If you stand still, you go down. If you make a little effort, you stay in the same place. If you make a lot of effort, you can move ahead and grow. Our lives are meant to forever grow towards “Sheleimus” – perfection. That is why we say farewell to a living person by saying “Leich **LeShalom**” – go **towards** peace; while we part from the dead by saying “Leich **BiShalom**” – go **in** peace. Go in whatever perfection you have accomplished, as you have nothing more to accomplish. But as long as a person is alive, we say “go towards perfection” because you still have what to accomplish and grow in your life.

That is why we blow the Shofar on Rosh Hashanah. The Aramaic word for Shofar has the word *Shifra*, which means to improve. The Shofar reminds us to grow and improve the quality of person we are. Make your deeds better – not just keep them good. It’s not enough to maintain the status quo – we have to improve!

Therefore, on Rosh Hashanah, G-d does not merely judge us in terms of where we are, but he also judges us vis-à-vis where we were. So if this year, we have two people standing on level 37, but last year one was on level 47 and the other was on level 27, they will be judged differently, as one is going up, while the other is going down. One will have a positive judgment, because he is progressing, while the other will have a negative judgment because he is regressing. ***In Judaism, the main thing is not where you are on the ladder, but what direction you are moving on the ladder!***

Therefore, the second aspect of the judgment is in terms of being climbers. G-d will judge us in terms of how much of a climber were we? How much did we improve? How much did we elevate ourselves from where we were last year? This all corresponds to the second part of the Mussaf Service, which is called “Zichronos” – remembrances. G-d does not only judge us only now for the present, but He also takes into consideration where we were in last year and where are you this year? And where you are this year, is judged in light of how much you progressed or regressed from last year.

The Peasetzna Rebbe, Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, writes in his memoirs [second entry] about personal growth, and makes a suggestion to each year, clarify a goal and envision the actualized “you” of next year. Visualize who this “you” will be: his attainments...his daily life...his character...and his inner essence. At the end of the entry he says: “But if next year comes and you have not actualized that “you,” it is as if your life has been cut short. The new “you” was aborted, it is not alive now, you are still an old “you” of perhaps years ago.” The Rebbe is saying that a year of no growth as an ambassador of G-d, is a year of death!

Now, in spite of our best efforts to change and grow, we may still fail in our attempts. You should not be discouraged, as G-d judges us by how much sincere effort we make, and rewards us for the efforts. One should never give up no matter how many previous failed attempts, as evident from the following story:

In the 1920s, George Mallory led an expedition to try to conquer Mt. Everest. The first expedition failed, as did the second. Then, with a team of the best quality and ability, Mallory made a third assault. But in spite of careful planning and extensive safety precautions, disaster struck: An avalanche hit, and Mallory and most of his party were killed.

When the few who did survive returned to England, they held a glorious banquet saluting the great people of Mallory’s final expedition. As the leader of the survivors stood to acknowledge the applause, he looked around the hall at the framed pictures of Mallory and his comrades who had died. Then he turned his back

to the crowd to face a huge picture of Mount Everest, which stood looming like a silent, unconquerable giant behind the banquet table.

With tears streaming down his face, he addressed the mountain on behalf of Mallory and his dead friends. "I speak to you, Mount Everest, in the name of all brave men living and those yet unborn. Mount Everest, you defeated us once, you defeated us twice; you defeated us here times. But Mount Everest, we shall someday defeat you, because you can't get any bigger, but we can! And indeed Sir Edmund Hillary was the first man to climb Mount Everest. On May 29, 1953 he scaled the highest mountain then known to man—29,000 feet straight up.

So we now have two aspects of the judgment. What level are we on now, and how does that compare to last year? The third aspect of the judgment is like soldiers. A person can be on a nice level, and is climbing, but there still is another aspect of the judgment that he must pass. Judaism tells us that each and every individual is created with unique talents and abilities in order to use it productively in this world. G-d put each and every one of us in this world in order to accomplish certain goals, and he invested the potential to be able to achieve that purpose. Now those achievements need not be Tekiah Gedolas [as per yesterday's drush] – G-d probably expects many little Teruahs from us. Consider the following story:

There once was a young woman who woke up in the morning to take a bath. She found a baby in the river and took the baby home and raised him. If someone would have told her on the spot that "You filled your purpose in this world!" She would wonder, "Is this my purpose in life – just saving this one little kid?" But looking back, it indeed was a very important thing – because that one little baby was Moses! Her act changed the history of the world! So even small, private things can be what G-d wants us to do in terms of using our talents appropriately.

And it is exactly those small acts that are so difficult to do. Here she saved a Jewish baby contrary to her father, Pharaoh's orders! In addition, she was going against the grain of the anti-Semitic Egyptian culture! But she had to be who she was – not what everyone else was! The trick is not to think that your purpose is the same as everyone else – do not allow peer pressure to cause you to lose sight of who you really are!

It is a person's responsibility to reach his potential in life. *In the Mussaf prayer, the text says that G-d judges "the deeds of people and his 'tafkid'" – his mission, his purpose.* So what is the difference between deeds and purpose? The answer is that deeds represent all the Mitzvos of the Torah that each and every one of us must do – prayer, charity, etc. We are all required to inculcate within ourselves the same Mitzvos, the same moral values, etc. But each person in addition to that, has things that are unique to them – talents and capabilities that only they possess. A person is expected not only to do what everyone else is doing, but to develop their talents and capabilities, and use them in service to G-d. So this third aspect of judgment sees if we are developing our unique talents and abilities or are you ignoring them. You might be doing what everyone else is doing, but you are not developing your unique identity.

This third judgment corresponds to the third aspect of the Mussaf service: Shofros. The Shofar awakens us to be able to take those abilities and talents and to work on our unique mission, and develop our unique selves.

This concept of living up to your potential will be one of the topics in our upcoming series "The Secret Behind the Secret" when we learn in detail about the "Secret to You!"

So those are the three aspects of judgment:

- Like sheep – what level are you on?

- Like climbers – what level are you on vis-à-vis where you were? Are you improving or not?
- Like soldiers – are you developing your unique capabilities and talents or are you ignoring that?

I want to leave you with one last story. The scene is Erev Yom Kippur, and for Orthodox Jews, it is the busiest, most crowded day in the Mikveh – especially in Israel, The usually daily clientele is always relatively homogeneous – Chassidim and the like; but on Erev Yom Kippur it includes a sprinkling of non- Chasidim. That day, everyone was extending greetings of “have an easy fast” or “gmar tov.” It’s a pretty social atmosphere.

Enters Jamie, a newcomer to the Mikveh, a student at Ohr Somayach. No one actually asked for his CV, but from his ponytail and earrings it was safe to assume that he had less immersion experience than most of the regulars.

Jamie had another identifying mark – a dead give-away that he would have done anything to eradicate at this moment – but now all he could do was to spread his hands to cover his shame. His attempts at concealment proved to be ironically effective at accentuating the very thing he wished to hide.

Jamie made his way into the crowded room, his arms folded over his biceps. It didn’t take a rocket scientist to realize that this beginner to Judaism was hiding his tattoos. There were those who gasped and gawked at the young man; and Jamie met no one’s gaze.

As he moved towards the pool, more people focused their attention to him. They were all curious to know what was hiding under his hand. Just a few feet from the pool, he lost his footing, slipped, and fell! By reflex, he grabbed the railing to protect himself.

Everyone became silent. His biceps – decorated with lewd, gaudy tattoos – were exposed to public view. A boisterous Mikveh was reduced to a tomb-like absence of sound – the mother of all silences!

An elderly man, slip-slapping in his bathing thongs, slowly makes his way to him. Jamie felt a cold like hand grip his shoulder, and turned back his eyes. The old man says in a Yiddish accented English: ***“Look here, my boy, I also have a tattoo!”***

He then pointed to the row of numbers etched into his forearm. He continued; ***“In case I should ever forget what those monsters had planned for me. It seems we’ve both come a long way.”***

He attempts to help him up and everything returns to normal.

Ladies and gentlemen, this story so beautifully describes why we are here today. Jamie and the old man were part of G-d’s flock of sheep, both identified by His brand. We have no way of knowing who was on a higher level, but I am sure they had both climbed a level during the course of that story. And they certainly accomplished their individual missions in that Mikveh. Let us reflect during this Mussaf service:

- During Malchios – what level are we on as part of the royal flock?
- During Zichronos – what change of levels have we reached during the past year?
- During Shofros – Have we used our unique talents as a soldier in G-d’s army?

May the Almighty judge us all favourably and grant us the pride in being part of the flock, the courage to improve on our levels, and the healthy self-esteem to accomplish our unique mission in life this year!