



Partners In Torah
San Diego-Los Angeles-Ventura
Take home Dvar Torah

5786 Rosh Hashana II
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Hello, Welcome!

**Partners In Torah is a community-wide,
independent and inclusive adult education
program**

**focusing on understanding Jewish
relevancy to our lives by studying text
most interesting to each participant.**

**Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour
each week, friendships are forged between
mentors and mentees.**

***Partners in Torah
has proven to be effective at reclaiming the
rich
legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and
guidance
for many who have, until now, lacked
access.***

Thank you for joining us!

**Please encourage friends to join you in
participating so that we may grow
together as
a community.**

תשפ"ו Rosh Hashanah II

The Mishna in Rosh Hashanah (1:2) teaches us that Rosh Hashanah is the day of Judgment for all mankind:

(ב) בְּאַרְבָּעָה פְּרָקִים הָעוֹלָם נִדוֹן ... בְּרֵאשִׁי הַשָּׁנָה כָּל בָּאֵי הָעוֹלָם עוֹבְרִין לְפָנָיו כְּבָנֵי מָרוֹן, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (תהלים לג) הַיּוֹצֵר יַחַד לִבָּם, הַמְבִּין אֶל כָּל מַעֲשֵׂהָם...

2) There are four times when the world is judged... [the third time is on] Rosh Hashanah, when every person who entered the world passes before Him (Hashem) like sheep. As it says (Psalms 33:15) "He who fashions their hearts together, Who comprehends all their deeds." (The day that Hashem fashioned their hearts - Rosh Hashanah, the day Hashem created man - is the day that Hashem looks into all of man's deeds)

In the Ashkenazic tradition, beginning with the first day of Elul, the month preceding Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we twice daily recite Psalm 27, once after the morning prayer, shacharit, and once after the evening prayer, arvit.

Psalm 27 begins:

(א) לְדָוִד יְדָוִד אֹרֵי וַיִּשְׁעֵי מִמִּי אֵיךָ יְדָוִד מֵעוֹז חַיִּי מִמִּי אֶפְחָד?

*1) A Psalm by David: Hashem is **my light** and **my salvation**, whom shall I fear? Hashem is my life's strength, whom shall I dread?*

(ב) בְּקֶרֶב עָלֵי מְרַעִים לֶאֱכֹל אֶת בְּשָׂרִי צָרִי וְאֵיבִי לִי הִמָּה כְּשָׁלוּ וַיִּפְּלוּ.

2) When evildoers approach me to devour my flesh, my tormentors and my foes against me, it is they who stumble and fall.

This customary recital is based on the Midrash in Vayikra Raba's (21:4) interpretation of the first verse.

(ד) רבנן פתרין קרא בראש השנה ויום הכפורים אורי בר"ה וישעי ביום
הכפורים ממי אירא עזי וזמרת קה

The Rabbis explain the verse as follows. "my light" refers to Rosh Hashanah, and "my salvation" refers to Yom Kippur, from whom shall I fear? ...

Midrashically, King David told us that he had no fear of the "evildoers who approached him to devour his flesh," because he had Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur to vanquish them. The Midrash insightfully recognized that King David was not referring to physical enemies because instead of saying "my light" and "my salvation" he would have said "my might" and "my strength", something appropriate for physical enemies. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, two very powerful days of prayer and teshuva, provide the remedy for this type of spiritual enemy.

Because King Davis was not talking about physical enemies, to which "tormentors and foes" was he referring? The Midrash continues.

בקרוב עלי מרעים אלו שרי אומות העולם לאכול את בשרי לפי ששרי אומות העולם
באין ומקטרגין על ישראל לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא ואומרים לפניו רבש"ע אלו עובדי
ע"ז ואלו עובדי ע"ז אלו מגלי עריות ואלו מגלי עריות אלו שופכי דמים ואלו שופכי
דמים מפני מה אלו יורדין לגיהנם ואלו אינן יורדין לגיהנם

"When the evildoers approach me," refers to the officers of the world's nations. (Our Sages teach us that each of the 70 nations has an angel in heaven, an "official," who looks out for the best interest of his nation) ***"to devour my flesh,"*** because the officers of the nations of the world come and accuse the Jewish Nation before Hashem with a seemingly legitimate argument: "Master of the Universe, these (the gentiles) are idol worshippers and these (the Jews) are idol worshippers; these (the gentiles) are immoral and these (the Jews) are immoral; these

(the gentiles) are murderers and these (the Jews) are murderers. Why should these (the gentiles) go to hell, and these (the Jews) not?

The Midrash reveals that the “evildoers” are the nations’ officers and that they have a grievance that they are airing before Hashem. “Why do You have mercy on the Jewish people when they are just like us? They are committing all the same crimes as we do!”

While the Mishna taught us that each individual person is judged on Rosh Hashanah, the Midrash informs us that there is a judgment against the Jewish nation as a whole as well.

Considering current events, it surely seems that for the last two years the claims of the other nations have been effective, as we are experiencing unprecedented hatred by so many of the world’s nations.

Consider: Israel is trying merely to live in peace and protect its innocent citizens from brutal attacks intended to kill them by enemies on all sides and from within, who have vowed to eradicate every last Jew in Israel; and yet, Israel is being absurdly condemned as an aggressor and the perpetrator of genocide! We know what to expect from countries such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Egypt, Turkey, Jordan, and Iran. But about Canada? the United Kingdom? Australia? Japan? Ireland? Norway? the Netherlands? China? Russia? Germany? Italy? and Spain? all of whom have issued statements condemning Israel for the “inhumane killing of civilians in Gaza!” Have they lost their minds? Do they not understand the difference between defensively killing people who have vowed to destroy you verses killing innocent civilians?

Instead of dropping one bomb on Gaza and leveling it once and for all, in an effort to minimize Gazan civilian casualties, Israel has chosen instead to send in its precious soldiers at great cost of human life and

wounded soldiers. Israel has lost over 900 holy soldiers in the campaign, and there are many more wounded whose lives have been irrevocably changed because of their sacrifice.

Before bombing a civilian area, Israel drops leaflets (!) warning the citizens of the planned bombing giving them ample time to seek safety. What other country in the world does, or ever did, that?

Does Israel receive any credit for its extreme efforts to minimize civilian casualties even at the expense of the lives of its own precious soldiers? No! No matter what Israel does, it is always wrong. The world's nations cannot stomach giving Israel credit for its almost self-destructive concern for its enemies' lives. It looks like their complaint in the Midrash has been accepted, and therefore they can lash out so vehemently against us.

So here is the interesting takeaway from the Midrash. King David has let us in on a great secret, *viz*, the antidote to the nations' claims against us is Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. King David did not fear the evildoers, tormentors, and foes *because of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur*. Something about Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur addresses and neutralizes the charges against us. What could that be?

The Sages use an insightful parable to help us understand the concepts: What is the difference between sitting for a portrait and going to a doctor for a checkup?

When sitting for a portrait, even the most unkempt person cleans himself up for the picture. Meet my friend Joe. Generally, Joe has stains on his shirt, his tie is askew, his jacket is always creased, his hair is a mess, and he always needs a shave. Yet, before sitting for a portrait, he will clean himself up. He will don his best suit- freshly cleaned with no

creases, put on a fresh clean starched shirt, and a new tie. He'll be sure to take a haircut and shave. Then he will stand in front of the mirror making sure that everything looks "picture perfect." If he has a pimple on one side of his face, he'll show the other side to the camera. He may generally have the world's most sour disposition, but for the camera he will put on his most charming smile.

When you take one look at Joe's picture on his wall you burst out laughing. *Is that you, Joe?* You never looked like that a day in your life. Who are you fooling by dressing up and posing like that for the photo? The answer is that he is not fooling anybody. Everybody knows that for a photo you look your best.

On the other hand, just the opposite obtains when a person goes to the doctor for a checkup. They put him in a room, and after handing him a flimsy robe they tell him to remove all his clothing and put it on. When the doctor finally comes into the room, our friend bares himself and his soul to the doctor, telling him in minute detail all of his aches and pains. "And when I lift up my arm like this, it hurts right here!" He wants to leave nothing out, because he wants the doctor to heal every last pain that he has.

Rosh Hashanah is אורי - **my light**- that, is, *a portrait*. Think of it as the flash of the camera taking your picture. In that flash of light, you want to look your best. Even though you may look sloppy during the year, on Rosh Hashanah you want to show Hashem your best.

Yom Kippur, on the other hand, is like going to the doctor. Hashem is ישעי - **my salvation**, my Savior from all of my ailments. I want to reveal all of my ailments and flaws to the doctor so that he can heal them. Hence, on *Yom Kippur* we confess all of our sins in the hope that Hashem

will forgive them so that we can be the picture-perfect person that Hashem saw on *Rosh Hashanah*.

Curiously, on Rosh Hashanah we make no mention at all of our sins. Instead, the prayers are about Hashem being the King of the universe, and as we proclaim Hashem the King of the world, we coronate Him as our king. But isn't Rosh Hashanah the day of judgment? Why don't we atone for our sins on Rosh Hashanah?

Our Sages teach us a profound insight into ourselves. The concept was best expressed by Rabbi Alexandri in the Talmud (Berachot 17a).

Rabbi Alexandri would add the following supplication to his daily prayers:

רבון העולמים גלוי וידוע לפניך שרצוננו לעשות רצונך; ומי מעכב? שאור שבעיסה
ושעבוד מלכיות. יהי רצון מלפניך שתצילנו מידם ונשוב לעשות חוקי רצונך בלבב
שלם

Master of the universe, it is revealed and known before You that our true desire is to do Your will, but what is standing in our way? The leaven in the dough and the society in which we live. Please save us from them so that we may fulfill Your commandments with all our hearts.

Because we have a soul that comes from Hashem Who is all good, our true self is necessarily holy and has only spiritual aspirations. Hence, every Jew's true essence wants to do Hashem's will. Stripped of the earthy body and the negative outside influences, we would naturally do only good.

Herein lies the secret to how Rosh Hashanah offers the answer to the strong accusations of the nations of the world. Yes, externally it may look like we are acting exactly like our gentile neighbors, but that is just

an illusion. When you would look deeply into every single Jew, you would find a holy soul that yearns to connect with its Maker and do His will. A Jew is a completely different creature than a gentile. His essence, spiritual potential, and abilities are from a different world than those of a gentile.

In this light, the image of a picture-perfect Jew is one proclaiming Hashem as his King and accepting to be Hashem's loyal servant. When we assume this posture, the gentiles have nothing to say. We are as different as night and day. On Rosh Hashanah we do not mention sin; rather, we focus on our fundamental station in life: a subject of the King of all kings, Hashem!

Yom Kippur completes the process of bringing us back to Hashem by removing the barriers - the sins - that create a wall between us.

This explains how Rosh Hashanah defends the *individual* engaged on Rosh Hashanah in the objective of the moment, but how does this work for our nation as a whole who may not be observing Rosh Hashanah in this way? The gentile nations of the world have it in for the entire Jewish nation, and in this regard they may have a valid point.

Our Sages teach us that we are plagued by two types of evil inclination, one from within and one from the outside. Rabbi Alexandri expressed both of them when giving the reasons that we are not doing Hashem's will as we would want to. They are: (1) *the leaven in the dough* and (2) *the society in which we live*.

The leaven in the dough symbolizes **the evil inclination that is within us**. Once the leaven has leavened the dough it becomes an integral, inseparable, invisible part of it. Similarly, we easily make the mistake of thinking that our internal inclination to pursue forbidden

pleasures is really us, and therefore we are only too happy follow it. If only we realized that the true me is my soul, which wants to do only good, and that there is a foreign influence prompting us in the other direction, it would be much easier to overcome it.

*The society we live in is **the evil force from the outside.***

Rabbi Yeruchem Levovitz צ"ל (1875-1936), a master of Mussar, makes an arresting observation.

כשנסתכל במבט היסטוריי ונתבונן לראות על איזה ענינים הזהירה התורה ביותר ועל מה הי' עיקר אזהרותיו של משרע"ה הנה כשנדפדף בתורה דף על דף נראה כי עיקר אזהרה היתה שלא יתערבו בגוים וילמדו ממעשיהם

When we look at history and focus on which matters the Torah cautioned us against the most, and what Moshe Rabbeinu was most concerned about, as we leaf through the pages of the Torah page by page, we will see that the most frequent warning was against socially mixing with the nations around us and learning from their ways.

Reb Yeruchem (his sobriquet in the Torah world) lists 10 different passages in the Torah that command the Jewish people to have no connection to their gentile neighbors, lest the latter cause the Jewish people to sin.

Just before Moshe left this earth, in this week's portion, Nitzavim (29:15,16), Moshe made the Jewish people swear that they would not veer after the idols of their neighbors. On this, Reb Yeruchem marvels at why Moshe would need to stress such matters to the very people who just went through 40 years in the wilderness under Hashem's cloud of Glory with manna falling by their doors every day and water coming from a rock.

Reb Yeruchem concludes that **the evil force from the outside** must be the most formidable challenge to the Jewish people, and therefore it must be repeatedly stressed even to holy people like the דור המדבר - the generation that lived 40 years in the wilderness.

We see how powerful this pull was from what the prophets have told us about the Jewish nation after they entered the Land of Israel. Numerous times the prophet exhorts us (Judges 3:7,8) something like this.

(ז) וַיַּעֲשׂוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי יְדֹד וַיִּשְׁכַּחוּ אֶת יְדֹד אֱלֹהֵיהֶם וַיַּעֲבֹדוּ אֶת הַבְּעָלִים וְאֶת הָאֲשֵׁרוֹת
(ח) וַיַּחַר אֵף יְדֹד בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּמְכְּרֵם בְּיַד כּוּשָׁן רִשְׁתֵּיתִים מֶלֶךְ אֲרָם נְהָרִים וַיַּעֲבֹדוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת כּוּשָׁן רִשְׁתֵּיתִים שְׁמֹנֶה שָׁנִים

7) And the Jewish people did what was evil in the eyes of Hashem and they forgot Hashem their G-d, and they worshipped the Baalim and the Ashera trees. 8) The wrath of Hashem flared against Israel and He delivered them into the hand of Cushan-rishathaim ... for eight years.

Just three chapters later (Judges 6:1):

(א) וַיַּעֲשׂוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי יְדֹד וַיִּתְּנֵם יְדֹד בְּיַד מִדְיָן שֶׁבַע שָׁנִים

1) And the Jewish people did what was evil in the eyes of Hashem, so Hashem delivered them into the hands of Midyan for seven years.

Hashem told the prophets the reason for the sudden control of the gentile nations attacking them.

This test always challenged the Jewish people, and Hashem had to constantly reel them back in by giving us into the hands of our enemies. This was not a punishment; it was to teach them a profound lesson. "You think you can abandon your birthright and join your gentile neighbors? This is not possible because they will torture and kill you." Unfortunately,

we have seen this pattern in history many times. And because we have no prophets today, we are not told where the problem lies, however, logic has it that perhaps the same lesson applies.

Why is this such a difficult test?

Maimonides provides the answer (Hilchot Deot 6:1).

(א) דרך ברייתו של אדם להיות נמשך בדעותיו ובמעשיו אחר ריעיו וחביריו
ונוהג במנהג אנשי מדינתו

Man was created in a way that he is influenced in his morals and actions by his friends and acquaintances, and he seeks to act like the people of his country.

Maimonides has revealed a psychological fact about the human being. Hashem made him such that he naturally tends to follow those in his surroundings. In today's terms, we are hard-wired to act this way and there is no escaping it.

So what options do we have? Maimonides provides the answer.

לפיכך צריך אדם להתחבר לצדיקים ולישב אצל החכמים תמיד כדי שילמוד
ממעשיהם ויתרחק מן הרשעים ההולכים בחשך כדי שלא ילמוד ממעשיהם

Therefore, a man must attach himself to righteous people and constantly sit among wise people so that he should learn from their actions. And he must distance himself from evil people who walk in the dark lest he learn from their actions.

Maimonides goes on to say that if a person lives in a city with evil people, he should move out. And if he can't find a suitable place to live, he should live alone in a cave or in the desert, so powerful is the influence

of our surroundings upon us, and so drastic are the measures that we must take to avoid them.

Our Sages teach us that this is the accusation of the officers of the seventy nations. Their critique is, “Why have you abandoned your precious birthright to embrace our way of life?”

Indeed, we are also challenged by our surroundings. The surrounding gentile lifestyle looks very exciting and fun. It is easy and carefree with no responsibilities. The main purpose in life is to have fun and enjoy all the pleasures that life has to offer. Sure, you need to have a job and show up to work so you can have money to afford those pleasures, but the main thing in life happens on the weekends and when you are not at work. This is our challenge today as well.

Enter Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the antidotes. Approached properly, these holy days can bring us back to our roots. They can open our eyes to the rich, meaningful legacy of our ancestors. They can restore our allegiance to Torah and Mitzvot. They can pull us away from the influences of our surroundings, which say to us, “Don’t worry about the future. Grab whatever you can while you still can!”

On Rosh Hashanah Hashem proclaims, “You are My subject and I have created you to fulfill a mission that cannot be accomplished by anyone other than you! Let Me look at you at your best, just as you would sit for a portrait!”

On Yom Kippur Hashem say to us, “Come, let Me clean you up and give you a new beginning! After today, you will be like a newborn baby, clean of sin.”

After celebrating these two holidays, we are ready to embark on a new path of connecting to Hashem and following His ways, to the exclusion of all others. Perhaps we will realize that the greatest blessing is within our Jewish birthright – our Torah and its peaceful ways. Perhaps we will open our eyes to the infinite number of kindnesses that Hashem does for us on a minute-to-minute basis, and to the infinite blessing that Hashem has bestowed upon us until this moment, which has brought us to where we are today. Perhaps we will take an honest look at the society around us and grasp that it's really not the best way to lead a worthwhile life.

Any participant in Torah learning, and even anyone reading this booklet, has already come to this realization and is actively pursuing a deeper connection to Hashem. If only we could touch all Jews and bring them back to their heritage.

Before Rosh Hashanah, we are all looking for a special merit to help us obtain a favorable judgment from Hashem. Here is a suggestion that is very easy, yet very powerful. Perhaps you have a friend or relative that you could interest in joining you on a Tuesday night to expose him or her to the warm and friendly atmosphere of Torah learning. Experience has shown that once someone has experienced it personally, that person is more inclined to join.

This gesture on your part would show Hashem that you love Him and His Torah enough to try to influence a fellow Jew to join the learning. If that occurs, you get the credit for all the Torah learned. What could be better than that?

We wish everyone a happy healthy new year; one filled with spiritual growth.