



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

5786 Rosh Hashana
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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

Two weeks from tonight we will be celebrating Rosh Hashanah, the day of judgment for every human being. The Mishnah in Tractate Rosh Hashanah teaches us (1:2):

(ב) בְּאַרְבָּעָה פְּרָקִים הָעוֹלָם נִדוֹן ... בְּרֵאשִׁי הַשָּׁנָה כָּל בְּאֵי הָעוֹלָם עוֹבְרִין לְפָנָיו כְּבָנֵי מְרוֹן, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (תהלים לג) הַיּוֹצֵר יַחַד לִבָּם, הַמְבִּין אֶל כָּל מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם...

2) There are four times when the world is judged... [the third time is on] Rosh Hashanah, when all people who entered the world pass before Him (Hashem) like sheep. As it says in the verse (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)

Why is Rosh Hashanah the day of Judgment?

The 1st of Tishrei, is the day on which Hashem created the first man, Adam. Therefore, it was on that day that Hashem became King of the Universe. How so?

Our sages teach us a profound concept:

יתברך שמו הגדול, קודם כל דבר, עלה ברצונו הפשוט לברוא העולמות, כי אין מלך בלא עם, שנאמר, 'ברוב עם הדרת מלך' [משלי י"ד כ"ח], וגם טבע הטוב להיטיב, ואם שאין עולם, למי ייטיב?

Hashem, may His Great Name be blessed, decided to create a world because "A king is not a king unless he has subjects, (if he has no subjects, over what is he king?)" as it says (Proverbs 14:28) "A multitude of people is a King's glory." Also, it is the way of those who are good to bestow goodness upon others, but if there are no others, upon whom can Hashem confer goodness?

Hence, with Adam's creation, Hashem had a subject upon whom to reign, and this made Hashem a King. This is the meaning of the first stanza of the well-known piyyut that begins the daily prayers, Adon Olam.

אָדוֹן עוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר מֶלֶךְ. בְּטֶרֶם כָּל יְצִיר נִבְרָא
לְעֵת נַעֲשֶׂה בְּחֶפְצוֹ כֹּל. אֲזִי מֶלֶךְ שְׁמוֹ נִקְרָא

(Hashem is the) *Master of the world, Who decided before any creature was created (to create the world). After everything was made according to His will, **then a King** He was called.*

Because Rosh Hashanah is the anniversary of Hashem's kingship, the day's focus is coronating Hashem as our King. We want to express to Him how pleased and privileged we feel to be His subjects. This is also one of the primary ideas underlying the Shofar blowing on Rosh Hashanah. Just as when a king is coronated the trumpets are sounded, so, too, we sound the Shofar to herald Hashem's coronation as King of the Universe and our personal King.

This is one of the reasons cited for why Rosh Hashanah constitutes the day of judgment. On the anniversary of Hashem making man and placing him in charge of His world, Hashem assesses and reevaluates how man is doing. Because each of us is in Hashem's plan, all human beings are judged for their part in the world to determine what their role will be for the coming year. This judgment is based on one's track record from last year. One who has been loyal and faithful to the King may receive a "promotion," so that his dedicated service can accomplish more for the king. One whose service has been spotty at best may need demotion. The possibilities are infinite, but we do know that Hashem is righteous and just, and that we will receive exactly what we deserve.

Going back to the Mishna, Maimonides' commentary explains:

וענינו שמחשבין על בני אדם ודנין עליהם בבריאות ובחלאים והמות והחיים וזולתם
מענייני האדם

What this means is that Hashem considers every person and judges whether he will be healthy or sickly, if he will live or die, and a myriad of other matters pertaining to him.

On Rosh Hashanah, Hashem judges and determines every aspect of one's life. Hashem there determines what tools one will receive to use in his personal service to the King.

This personal court case for each of us is very serious indeed! So much is at stake! When we look back at the funerals that we attended over the past year, we realize that on last Rosh Hashanah Hashem issued the decree that this would be that person's last year of life. When we hear about someone who has become seriously ill or has lost his fortune, it, too, was determined on last Rosh Hashanah.

If a letter arrived in your mailbox from the local prosecutor alleging that you have committed a murder for which the penalty is death, how would you react? Even if you were innocent, would you calmly set it aside with your other mail "to look at later," or would you be trembling in fear? And what if there were grounds for the allegations? Of course, there is an explanation - you are not a cold-blooded murderer - but will the court accept your explanation?

And what if a letter instead arrived from the IRS claiming that you owe many thousands of dollars in past taxes, interest, and penalties? Even if you knew that you were completely innocent, how would you react? And what if you were truly guilty?

In both scenarios, your first step would be to find the best lawyer that you could afford! You would also be aggressively collecting every shred of evidence in your favor to give to the lawyer so that he can adequately defend you. At the very least, you realize that a major battle

lies before you, and you must take the matter very seriously if you hope to come clean of the allegations.

This is exactly where we stand today, just a few weeks before our “hearing” on Rosh Hashanah. Our lives hang in the balance! Our health and wealth hang in the balance! What have we done in preparation for our court case? Have we put any thought into what we will say in our defense at the hearing? Do we have a plan for how we expect to explain away all the legitimate complaints against us?

The greater problem is that we know that we are guilty! The prosecution has been meticulously collecting evidence against us by observing and recording our every action and deed for the whole year. There is no way to plead “not guilty” on this one; there is even a video with sound of each transgression to back up the allegation! What options do we have?

Our Sages teach us that we indeed have many options before us, but we must be sincere, and work quickly, to implement them.

The first and best option is to *eliminate* the evidence against us. *We have the ability to remove from our record every shred of accusatory evidence against us.* How do we do that? By doing “teshuva,” that is, repenting for having done the action.

The teshuva process comprises three simple steps, but they must be sincere. If a person’s heart is not in it 100%, *it won’t work.*

1. ודוי - Verbally, privately, admit the sin – acknowledge that we have disobeyed Hashem’s commandments - and own up to it.
2. חרטה - Remorse – regret having done the sin, to the point where you wish you could go back in time and pull it out of existence.
3. עזיבת החטא - Accept upon oneself never to do it again. This follows logically from #2 because if a person would be ready to do it again

at the next opportunity, or even at some future time, he obviously can't feel remorse for having done it.

Our Sages teach us that when a person properly goes through the process of teshuva, it is as if the act has been removed from reality. He will never have to face that action and be subject to judgment for it, ever.

The following true story illustrates this point. (I heard this story from two different, unrelated people; therefore, I believe it to be true.)

It was a beautiful wedding; the bride and groom made such a handsome couple. Everyone was saying how it was a match made in heaven. After the last dance, the bride's father went to his jacket, which he had draped over the back of his chair during the dancing, to retrieve the envelope of cash he had prepared to pay the caterer. To his horror, the envelope was gone! There were thousands of dollars in that envelope. He had been saving for years to be able to afford this wedding for his lovely daughter.

"It probably fell out during the dancing," he figured. They searched the entire hall from top to bottom, with no success. Perhaps it got folded up in the tablecloth when the table was cleaned. They searched every tablecloth, again, with no success.

Oh well! What could he do? He would have to put together a new payment for the caterer. Where it would come from, he did not know.

Fast forward a few months. The bride's parents finally receive the wedding video. They sit down to watch it, and about halfway through the video, they watch in shock as they see the groom's father taking the envelope from the bride's father's jacket pocket hanging on the chair.

Now they knew where the money went, but how were they going to get it back? If they were to accuse the groom's father of stealing it, he

would surely deny it, and the accusation would only cause very hard feelings.

After contemplating the problem for a while, they came up with the following idea. They would invite the groom's parents to watch the wedding video with them! This way, the father of the groom would see himself stealing the money and he would have to pay back the money.

Everything started out jovial and festive as the video began. However, as the video progressed, the groom's father began fidgeting. As the video continued, he became more and more restless. He was surely thinking, "Oh no! What if I was caught on tape stealing the money!" As the video played on, he started sweating profusely, and when they got to the part which would show him stealing the money, he could bear to watch it no more, and he passed out on the floor.

This is what our court case on Rosh Hashanah is going to look like. There we will sit with the judges, the holy Sages of our time, as the video of all our transgressions plays before us, showing everyone how guilty we are. We will be squirming and sweating in embarrassment as our transgressions are displayed on the big screen for all to see. It will not be pleasant.

But we are destined to suffer this embarrassment *only* if we do not do teshuva. Teshuva edits the video! Teshuva empowers us to splice the video and remove completely from the record the negative footage of our misdeeds. It falls to the floor and is swept into the garbage, never to be seen on the big screen. With this, we have closed the case against us. With no evidence, we are free and clear of any misconduct.

Our Sages teach us (Talmud Yoma 86b) that there are two levels of teshuva.

כי השב מיראה זדונות נעשים לו כשגגות, אך השב מאהבה זדונות נעשים לו
בזכויות

When one does teshuva out of fear, his deliberate transgressions become like unintentional deeds, whereas when one does teshuva out of love, his deliberate transgressions become merits.

The entry level of teshuva is when one does teshuva out of fear of the consequences of his deeds. Like our story, he wants to get rid of the evidence so that no charges against him remain. In this case, our sages tell us that his deliberate transgressions are treated like unintentional transgressions.

Yet, if a person “ups his game” and does teshuva out of love for Hashem, a new, extraordinary reality obtains; his deliberate infractions transform into merits instead of demerits. Teshuva “out of love” is when a person thinks deeply about all the great good that Hashem does for him and comes to feel deep feelings of gratitude to Him, which causes him to be struck by the extraordinary incongruity of his actions. He thinks to himself, “How could I possibly ignore Hashem’s wishes when He is so good to me? He is so kind and giving to me, and I act like He doesn’t exist!” When the motivation behind one’s remorse for his sins stems from his love for Hashem, since his sins have brought him closer to Hashem, those “sins” become merits.

What an amazing opportunity our Creator has given us to rectify our deficient conduct before the awesome day of judgment! One must be a total fool not to take advantage of the opportunity to cleanse himself of his misdeeds.

Doing teshuva is our *best* option, because it deletes all the evidence against us.

* * *

There are other actions that we can also take to help us in our case for a good new year.

Hashem judges us with the same measure by which we judge others –מדה כנגד מדה (“measure for measure”). If we are kind and forgiving to others, Hashem will be kind and forgiving to us. On the other hand, if we are strict and unforgiving to others, Hashem says, “Okay, so you think that’s the right way to be? I’ll just apply your standard to you and treat you the exact same way that you treat others; strict and unforgiving”

Rava teaches us (Talmud Rosh Hashanah 17a):

[אמר רבא] כל המעביר על מדותיו מעבירין לו על כל פשעיו שנאמר נושא עון ועובר על פשע למי נושא עון למי שעובר על פשע.

Whoever overlooks his honor and doesn’t lash back when his honor has been trashed, Hashem overlooks his sins.

In this regard, the Talmud (Rosh Hashanah) tells the following story.

רב הונא בריה דרב יהושע חלש על רב פפא לשיולי ביה חזייה דחליש ליה עלמא אמר להו צביתו ליה זוודתא לסוף איתפח הוה מיבסיף רב פפא למיחזייה אמרו ליה מאי חזית אמר (ליה) [להו] אין הכי הוה ואמר להו הקדוש ברוך הוא הואיל ולא מוקים במיליה לא תקומו בהדיה

Rav Huna the son of Rabbi Yehoshua became very ill. Rav Papa went to visit him and saw that he was near the end. Rav Papa told the family to prepare Rav Huna’s shrouds because he isn’t going to make it. In the end, however, Rav Huna got better, and Rav Papa was embarrassed to see him. When they met, Rav Huna said to Rav Papa, “You were correct. I was supposed to die. But Hashem told them, ‘Since he (Rav Huna) doesn’t stand on his honor, don’t be particular about his sins and let him live.’”

When Hashem sees that we can forego our honor, He can do the same and not be a stickler about our sins. This is one true and tried tactic for receiving a lenient judgment on Rosh Hashanah.

There is another very powerful application of this principle.

Our Sages thus teach us that one of the most effective ways of cleansing our sins is to endure embarrassment and not to respond negatively to the one who has embarrassed us, an admittedly very difficult task.

The Talmud (Shabbat 88b) teaches us:

תנו רבנן עלובין ואינן עולבין שומעין חרפתן ואינן משיבין עושין מאהבה ושמחין
ביסורין עליהן הכתוב אומר ואוהביו כצאת השמש בגבורתו

The Sages taught: Ones who are embarrassed by others but do not respond and embarrass the wrongdoer, accepting the pain of embarrassment with happiness and love; about them the verse says, "And those who love Hashem are like the powerfully rising sun."

These people are especially beloved to Hashem, and He accepts the pain of their embarrassment as atonement for all their sins. Our Sages would even rejoice when they were the victim of someone's ridicule because they knew that they had their slate cleaned by accepting the embarrassment and not responding to it.

Based on the principle that Hashem treats us the way we treat others, there are other scenarios that can help us in our judgment. The Talmud (Shabbat 151b) teaches us:

תניא רבן גמליאל ברבי אומר ונתן לך רחמים ורחמך והרבך כל המרחם על הבריות
מרחמין עליו מן השמים וכל שאינו מרחם על הבריות אין מרחמין עליו מן השמים

Raban Gamliel son of Rebbe taught... Whoever has mercy on Hashem's creatures, Hashem will have mercy on him from heaven. And whoever

does not have mercy on Hashem's creatures, Hashem will not have mercy on him from heaven.

Our Sages go as far as to say that one who has mercy on others has earned a special standard of judgment from the Almighty. He has acquired it through his many acts of kindness to others, so that when *he* comes before Hashem for judgment, he is shown more mercy than the others.

There are a few reasons for this. One is that this person is Hashem's partner when bestowing kindness to His people. Hashem wants to bestow goodness on all of His creations, but because He cannot do so through outright miracles, He must camouflage it in people's natural acts. Those who choose to share their blessings with others are doing Hashem's work for Him. For this, Hashem feels very close and beholden to these people.

Secondly, the measure for measure principle applies. Because you have made this world a more pleasant and comfortable place for someone else to live, Hashem, in turn, makes this world a more pleasant and comfortable place for you to live. This is why kindness to others is the only mitzvah that Hashem rewards in this world.

There is yet another benefit to being the one to do Hashem's work of providing help to the needy. When the time comes for a person to leave the world, Hashem must take into account all the ramifications that will result when this person is no longer here. This is because Hashem's judgments must be perfect in every way. Hashem says about Himself in the Torah (Deuteronomy 22:4).

(ד) הַצֹּרֵר תְּמִים פָּעֵלוּ בִּי כָּל דְּרָכָיו מְשֻׁפָּט אֵל אֱמוּנָה וְאִין עֹל צְדִיק וַיִּשָּׁר הוּא

2) The Rock! – perfect in His work; for all His paths are justice; A G-d of faith without iniquity, righteous and fair is He.

If there is even one ripple effect that will affect someone who doesn't deserve that consequence, Hashem cannot take this person away. That would be an injustice to that person, and it is impossible for Hashem commit an injustice.

Our Sages teach us that one of the ways to be guaranteed a good judgment is to make yourself needed by others – by as many as possible. This way, if there were a negative judgment against you, Hashem would have to make sure that each of the people who receives benefit from you deserves the pain and discomfort, or lack of assistance, that they will experience when you are gone. Among the many recipients of your goodness, there is bound to be at least one righteous person who doesn't deserve it, and therefore Hashem won't be able to take you away because it would be unfair to that person.

Similarly, when one is a partner with Hashem in providing for the needy, before Hashem can take that person away, He must find a replacement, something that may not be so simple.

There is yet another tactic that we can use to tilt the scale of judgment in our favor. The Talmud (Shabbat 127b) teaches us:

תנו רבנן הדין חבירו לכף זכות דנין אותו לזכות

The Sages taught. Whoever gives his friend the benefit of the doubt, in heaven they will give him the benefit of the doubt.

If someone whom I know to be a good person treats me inappropriately, I must give him the benefit of the doubt and try to understand his conduct in a positive way. Because I know him as someone who always wants to do the right thing, it would be wrong to assume that this time he meant to hurt me. Rather, there is probably a perfectly logical reason for his behavior. For example, let's say that I see my friend with a wallet full of bills and ask him to lend me twenty dollars.

He responds, “Sorry, I don’t have it.” Instead of concluding, “What a liar,” if I know him to be honest, I would have to seek an explanation for why he told me that he doesn’t have it, even though he clearly has the bills in his wallet. Something like, “Perhaps he has a bill due today, and he needs all his cash to pay it so that he doesn’t incur a late fee.” This would be a simple, plausible explanation for his conduct that, in my mind, preserves his integrity. So, since I judged my friend favorably, Hashem will confer the same benefit of the doubt on me.

This is another way to receive leniency in our judgment: If we judge others favorably in a situation where the motivations for our actions are mixed, namely, some intentions are good and some are selfish, Hashem will also give *us* the benefit of the doubt and judge us based on our good intentions only.

It is interesting to note that on Rosh Hashanah proper, in the entire prayer liturgy, there is no mention of sin or forgiveness for sin whatsoever. The focus of Rosh Hashanah is coronating the King, accepting Hashem as our personal King. We try to cleanse our sins prior to appearing before the King for judgment through special prayers for forgiveness that are recited a week before Rosh Hashanah. When we have cleansed ourselves of our sins in preparation for our judgment, Hashem will look at us very favorably and give us a great judgment for the coming year.

So, although we stand just a few short weeks before our day in court, we have learned that if we prepare properly, there are many tactics we can employ to secure a good judgement.

The first and best is of course to disarm the prosecution by removing all of the evidence against us. Indeed, we can, by repenting out of love instead of out of fear, even transform his evidence into support for our cause.

Additionally, we can become invaluable to Hashem in many ways so that He, so to speak, comes to depend on us and cannot afford to take us away from the world. If we plan correctly and become “needed” by Hashem, we can feel confident that Hashem will grant us a good judgment, one that grants us only health and happiness for the coming year so that we may continue our holy work on His behalf.

Shanah Tova Umetukah!