

ROSH HASHANAH

תשפ"ה

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Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Rosh Hashanah

A graphic for Rosh Hashanah featuring a background of colorful bokeh lights and a person's hands holding a shofar. The text "ROSH HASHANAH" is written in large, bold letters, with "תשפ"ה" below it.

ROSH HASHANAH

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The Ten Days of Repentance

Rambam in Laws of Repentance: "Although repentance and supplicating G-d is valuable and beneficial throughout the year, during the ten day period from *Rosh Hashanah* to *Yom Kippur* it is exceptionally beneficial. During this special time, one's repentance and supplications are accepted immediately by G-d.

"*Yeshaya* to the Jewish people, 'You should seek out G-d when He is found. Call to Him when He is close.'"

Although one can repent and call out to G-d throughout the year, the repentance and supplications may be rejected because of lack of worthiness. However, during the ten day period between *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*, because it is a time of intense Mercy, one's repentance and supplications will be accepted by G-d. He is more receptive to the prayers of the Jewish people at this time than any other time during the year. Where do we see G-d's immediate receptivity from the words of *Yeshaya*?

Rambam: Before one repents, "He is despised, putrid and an abomination before G-d. As it states, 'Your sins create a barrier between you and G-d.' If one is tarnished by sin, when he performs a *mitzvah* G-d rejects it and it is thrown back at the individual.... However, after one repents, one is regarded by G-d as beloved, precious, and special. Through repentance, the individual becomes close to G-d."

When one repents, his supplications are immediately received by G-d because he is close to Him. Thus, it is a time "when G-d is found." It is through repentance that one removes all obstacles and obstructions between himself and G-d. He is endeared to his Creator. Therefore, *Yeshaya* writes, "You should seek out G-d when He is found." Meaning, one should supplicate G-d after repenting because it is then that He will be close, thus allowing one's repentance and supplications to be received.

Gemara: During the ten-day period between *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*, G-d is closest to the Jewish

people. G-d has an exceptional level of love and intimacy with His people during this time. *Rosh Hashanah*, which is the first day of the ten days of repentance, is the Day of Judgment, when even the angels in heaven tremble with fear because of G-d's Judgment.

If there is such a level of exacting judgment at this time, how could the repentance and supplication of the Jew be accepted immediately by G-d? Seemingly, if one's repentance and supplications were not at the most perfect level they would be rejected. It implies that although *Rosh Hashanah* is a day of intense judgment, it is also a time of exceptional mercy. How do we reconcile these two realities?

Rosh Hashanah is a time of the most intense level of judgment. It is a time when *satan* is permitted to prosecute the Jewish people. Nevertheless, they have a mechanism that can silence that prosecution. Judgment can only be invoked and implemented if the prosecutor is allowed to deliver his prosecution before G-d.

Midrash: When the *shofar* is blown, "G-d stands from His Throne of Judgment and sits on His Throne of Mercy." Once prosecution is silenced, the Mercy of G-d comes into effect on a most profound level. This comes about when G-d sits on His Throne of Mercy as the King of all existence. Because G-d becomes close to the Jewish people it is a time when "He is found." Consequently, G-d accepts one's repentance and supplications immediately. The sound of the ram's horn reminds G-d of *Avraham's* exceptional sacrifice at the time of the *Akeidah* (the binding of *Yitzchak*). It is in this merit that the sound of the *shofar* has the ability to silence the prosecution against the Jewish people until the end of time.

Yesod v'Shores ha Avodah: Although one does not verbalize one's repentance on *Rosh Hashanah*, one should undergo its process by thinking about all of one's failings and repenting in one's heart, while the *shofar* is being blown. One should have a sense of remorse for the wrong that he had done and commit himself never to repeat it in the future. When G-d sees that His children are engaged in repentance, He is attentive to their prayers. One must therefore take advantage of this opportunity that is at hand.

The Innate Power of Torah

Torah in Haazinu: "May my teaching (*Torah*) pierce you like the rain, may my utterance flow like the dew..."

Midrash: "Why is *Torah* compared to rain? Just as the rain has the ability to penetrate and dissolve stone so too can the *Torah* penetrate the heart that is made of stone."

Gemara: *Rebbe Akiva* was inspired to pursue a lifetime of *Torah* study because he noticed that over time a small stream of water had dissolved a stone. He drew from this and concluded, 'If water has the ability to penetrate stone, then the *Torah* can penetrate my heart that is no harder than stone.' Our Rabbis of blessed memory teach us that if the evil inclination is like stone the *Torah* will melt it, if it is like iron it will cause it to burst. Therefore, it is in the best interest of the individual to dedicate himself to *Torah* study day and night. As it is stated in the Book of Joshua, 'You should mediate (in *Torah*) day and night.'

G-d created the evil inclination in order to create a context for man to be able to have free choice. One is continuously challenged by his evil inclination. The only way one can contend with and destroy this inclination is through the study of *Torah*. As the *Gemara* in Tractate *Kiddushin* states, "I have created the evil inclination, I have created the *Torah* as its antidote." If one engages in *Torah* study it will dissolve the evil inclination as water dissolves stone.

Midrash: "This is the reason that if one says, 'I have toiled (in *Torah*) and did not find it,' he should not be believed." What is the relevance of coming upon the truth of *Torah* to the destruction of the evil inclination through its study?

Gemara in Tractate *Berachos*: G-d is not receptive to one's prayers because one's sins act as an iron partition that prevent them from ascending. The study of *Torah* allows one to perceive and understand truth. Without the study of *Torah*, one's perception of truth is occluded by the conflicts of interest of one's desires. However, by engaging in *Torah* study, that conflict (evil inclination) will be removed because one had come upon the truth of *Torah*.

Therefore, if one claims to have toiled in *Torah* sufficiently he should have come upon its truth. If he did not come upon its truth, it is an indication that he did not toil in it sufficiently. There is something innate in the intense *Torah* study process that dissolves and obliterates the evil inclination that exists within man. Therefore, if one engages in it sufficiently, he will definitely find it.

Rav Baruch Baer Leibowitz z'tl was one of the primary disciples of *Reb Chaim of Brisk z'tl* and was the *Rosh*

HaYeshivah of Kaminetz. During one of his Talmudic discourses one of his students had asked him a difficult question on the subject matter at hand. *Rav Baruch Baer* answered the student without any hesitation. All of the students who were present at the discourse were astounded at the *Rosh Yeshiva's* immediate response, which revealed his extraordinary intellect and genius.

The following day, the *Rosh Yeshiva* approached the student who had asked the question, and answered him again as he had done on the previous day. The student could not understand the intent of his *Rosh Yeshiva* sharing with him the same identical answer as the previous day. *Rav Baruch Baer* had already shared with the identical answer verbatim the day before. The student had asked him, "Why are you repeating to me today what you had said yesterday?"

Rav Baruch Baer answered, "Yesterday my answer was rooted and emanated from my intellect without any degree of effort or toil. However, what I am telling you today, although it is the same answer, it came about through a process of self-application and toil. This is because the knowledge and truth of *Torah* that comes as a result of toiling has a more profound effect than one that only stems from one's intellect." It is the toiling process in *Torah* that removes the barriers and occlusions, thus allowing one to see truth in a compelling context.

The process of toiling in itself affects the individual. Two people may arrive at the same answer to a *Torah* query, one through his superior intellect and the other through toiling endless hours. It is the one who had toiled in *Torah* who will be come upon truth that is irrefutable because of the process in which he had engaged. The other individual, although he had come upon the same truth, because it did not come through toiling, it will not be established as irrefutable truth.

Gemara in Tractate *Kiddushin*: If one is overcome by "the despicable character (evil inclination), one should immediately go to the study hall and engaged in *Torah* study. It is because through the study of *Torah* it will be obliterated and dissolved.

Something that is Simple But Yet Very Difficult

Torah: "For this commandment that I command you today– it is not hidden from you and it is not distant. It is

not in heaven, (for you) to say, 'Who can ascend to heaven for us... it is in your mouth and your heart to perform it.'" There is an argument among the commentators as to which *mitzvah* this verse is referring.

Rashi: "This commandment that I command you today" is referring to the *mitzvah* of *Torah* study. One need not traverse the sea or ascend to heaven to attain its wisdom, but rather, one only needs to engage in its study. This *mitzvah* can be readily fulfilled because it is available and close to every Jew.

Sforno: The *mitzvah* to which the verse is referring is the *mitzvah* of repentance (*teshuvah*). Every Jew has relevance to repentance and it is not beyond his capacity. One must first sense and recognize that he has failed. It is only after this recognition of the wrong can one repent. However, it is not simple matter to be able to introspect and assess one's own failings. One needs to have the clarity to be able to go beyond his own conflicts of interest and justifications.

There are issues that one needs to have the benefit of prophets and advanced *Torah* sages in order to come upon them. However, the process of repentance is not something that requires these special individuals. The solution to one's spiritual issues lies within the individual. All one needs to do is to go beyond his ego and reflect upon his actions in order to address his failings. One does not need the assistance of a prophet or *Torah* sage to do this.

Rambam: Repentance is first to have remorse for the wrong that one has done followed by a commitment to not to transgress again in the future. *Sforno* explains that the recognition of the wrong is not limited to only understand that one has done wrong, but rather one should appreciate that he has transgressed against G-d, the King of the Universe Who is the One who provides him with everything. This is a more profound appreciation of one's failing.

Rambam: Part of the repentance process is to confess one's sins "Before G-d." If one already is aware of his transgressions and G's is aware of everything, what is the value of expressing one's sins aloud? By enunciating one's transgressions, with the understanding that he is doing so before the Master of the Universe, one will appreciate the profundity of his sin. He will come to realize that he not only did not fulfill his own potential, but rather, he diminished all existence by violating the Word of G-d.

In addition, if one reflects upon all of the good that G-d has given him he will realize that he has transgressed against the One who provides him with every aspect of his existence. However, this degree of understanding is not readily available to everyone. One must supplicate G-d to allow him to be able to see the truth. As we say in the blessing that precedes the blessing of repentance, "You graciously endow man with wisdom and teach insight to a frail mortal..." Without G-d's endowment of understanding and discretion to see something in its proper light one cannot advance to the level of recognizing one's failing to begin the repentance process.

G-d Demonstrates His Dominion Through Judgment

Torah: "You shall be holy..."

Midrash citing a verse from *Yeshaya*: "G-d was exalted through judgment..." How was G-d exalted through judgment? G-d becomes exalted in existence when He judges the nations of the world. As the verse states, 'G-d establishes Himself for battle and He stands to judge the nations...' The verse continues, '...The Holy G-d will be sanctified through His righteousness/charity...' What is the charity that G-d will do? At the end of time when G-d will judge the Jewish people, He will do so favorably despite their shortcomings.

"This is the meaning of 'G-d will be sanctified through His charity.' G-d will be the advocate of the Jewish people and He will speak abundantly on their behalf to bring about their salvation. G-d said to the Jewish people, 'At the end of time I will be sanctified through you.' By demonstrating His Attribute of Kindness, as being the advocate of the Jewish people, G-d will be sanctified...G-d said to them, 'And therefore you must be sanctified through Me.'"

It is interesting to note that on *Rosh Hashanah*, the Day of Judgment, when we conclude the blessing of the holiness of G-d's Name we insert the verse from *Yeshaya* "G-d, Master of Legions will be exalted in judgment, and the holy G-d will be sanctified in righteousness/charity." The blessing concludes, "G-d, the holy King."

Gemara in Tractate *Rosh Hashanah*: On *Rosh Hashanah*, the entire world stands in judgment before G-d. Not only are the Jewish people judged on that day, but also the nations of the world. When G-d institutes judgment on the world, He is exalted. In addition, G-d is sanctified

through His righteousness because He acts as the advocate of the Jewish people. Despite the intensity of the prosecution, G-d demonstrates His Mastership by deflecting the prosecution, as the advocate of the Jewish people. Thus, G-d is sanctified through bringing about a favorable judgment on behalf of the Jewish people.

Chofetz Chaim in *Loving Kindness (Ahavas Chesed)*: Most times, judgment is adjudicated through the Heavenly Court, with G-d presiding over it. However, there are times when G-d Himself adjudicates the case of an individual without the participation of the Heavenly Court. On *Rosh Hashanah* the day of judgment, regarding the predicament of the Jewish people, G-d Himself intervenes on their behalf as the Holy King.

Despite the level of prosecution against the Jewish people, He acts as their advocate. At the end of time, G-d will be acknowledged by all humanity as the Supreme King. It is at that time that He will judge all the nations of the world and they will be condemned. However, He will demonstrate His righteousness/charity to the Jewish people by judging them favorably. By acting as their advocate at the end of time, despite their failings, G-d will be sanctified and recognized as the Master of all existence.

Shofar, Entering into the Inner Sanctum of G-d

Mishna in Tractate *Rosh Hashanah*: A *Shofar* cannot be made from the horn of a cow. The *Mishna* gives two reasons for this. The first reason is that the horn of a cow is referred to as "keren" and not "Shofar." Secondly, there is a principle "Ein kateigor naaseh sanheigor – a prosecutor cannot be an advocate." The horn of the cow represents the Golden Calf (*Chet Ha'Eigel*) with which the Jews sinned at Sinai. Anything which has relevance to the Golden Calf must be avoided at a time when we are in need of an advocate. Any derivative of the cow or gold arouses the most serious level of prosecution against the Jewish people.

On *Yom Kippur*, the *Kohen Gadol* (the High Priest) officiated with two sets of vestments. He would wear the golden vestments when he performed the service in the outer sanctuary of the Temple. However, when he performed the service that was particular to *Yom Kippur*, which required him to enter the Holy of Holies, he wore white vestments. He was not permitted to wear the golden vestments for the *Yom Kippur* service

because he had to enter the Holy of Holies (the location of the *Shechina* – the Divine Presence) to atone for the Jewish People. If he had worn gold, he could not have functioned in the capacity of an advocate because gold arouses prosecution.

Gemara: Since the principle “a prosecutor cannot be an advocate” only has relevance within the context of the Holy of Holies, the location of the Divine Presence, then why is it that one cannot utilize the horn of a cow to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *Shofar* since the *mitzvah* is fulfilled outside of the Holy of Holies? Since the purpose of the blowing of the *Shofar* it to cause G-d to “remember” (*zikaron*) the merits of the Jewish people, when one blows the *Shofar* it is considered as if he is standing inside the Holy of Holies. The blowing of the *Shofar* brings about an intimacy between the Jew and G-d that is the equivalent of standing in the Holy of Holies. Thus, at this moment, the prosecutor cannot be an advocate (the cow horn cannot be used). What aspect of the Jewish people do we want G-d to “remember” on *Rosh Hashanah*?

Gemara: Should the shape of the *Shofar* should be bent or straight? It should be bent “*kafif*” (in Hebrew). Since the blowing of the *Shofar* is intended to “remind” G-d of the merits of the Jewish people, it should also reflect their posture- which is being humble and bent before Him.

Shulchan Aruch: Although during the year we recite the *Amidah* in an erect position, it is advisable to recite the *Amidah* of *Rosh Hashanah* in a slightly bent position. This is to indicate one’s humility and submission. The Jew has the unique quality of submitting to G-d. No other people have submitted themselves as the Jewish people have done. When G-d gave the *Torah* to the Jewish people, they accepted it unequivocally by declaring “*Naaseh V’nishma* – we will do and we will listen.” All of the nations of the world when offered the *Torah* had asked G-d, “What is written in it?” in order to determine if they wanted to accept it. The Jewish people had negated themselves to G-d to such a degree that He had asked, “Who revealed this secret (known only to the angels) to My children?”

The only separation between the Jew and G-d is his own conflicts of interest and agenda. However, when the Jew blows the *Shofar* it recalls the level of negation demonstrated by *Avraham* our Patriarch. He was willing to sacrifice his only son because G-d had commanded him to do so. Although G-d had promised *Avraham* that he would his offspring would be as numerous as the

stars in heaven, he did not question the word of G-d. This level of submission is a prerequisite to being able to enter the Holy of Holies. The *Shofar* causes G-d to “remember” that the Jew possesses the characteristic of submission of *Avraham*. If *Avraham* was able to perform the *Akeidah*, every Jew as his spiritual heir, has the ability to do the same.

Reb Chaim of Volozhin z’tl in his commentary on *Pirkei Avos (Ethics of Our Fathers)*: The reason Jews throughout history have given their lives not to submit to idolatry is because *Avraham* had inculcated this characteristic into his spirituality.

Rambam in *Laws of Repentance*, “Although the obligation of blowing of the *Shofar* is a Divine Decree in the *Torah*, simultaneously the blowing of the *Shofar* is also an allusion (*remez*).” The message that the *Shofar* conveys is – all those who are asleep or in a deep slumber should awaken. They should introspect and reflect on their past behavior and do *teshuvah* (repent).

Part of the *teshuvah* process is to remember one’s Creator. Those who are in a slumber have forgotten the truth because they are consumed with the vanities of time. They occupy themselves completely with pursuits of vanity and emptiness, which have no value. Gaze upon your souls and better yourselves and abandon your evil ways and improper thoughts. The *Shofar* awakens that which is dormant within the Jew because he has the inherent ability to submit to G-d.

G-d’s Love for the Jewish People

Torah: At the end of time the Jewish people will eventually do *teshuvah* and return to G-d. As a result of this, G-d will bring forth great blessing to the Jews and He will, “...return to rejoice (*I’sus*) over you (the Jewish People) for good, as He rejoiced (*sos*) over your forefathers, when you listen to the voice of *Hashem*, your G-d...” The *Torah* uses the term “*sos*” to refer to the joy that G-d will feel at this time. Why does the *Torah* use the term “*sos*” rather than “*simcha*” or many other expressions of rejoicing?

King David in Psalms: “I rejoice (*sos*) over your words (the *Torah*) as if I found a large amount of spoils.” King David could have expressed his joy over the *Torah* and *mitzvos* with other terms, however, he specifically chose this term.

Vilna Gaon z'tl: The word “*simcha*” indicates joy that is complete, while the term “*sos*” denotes a happiness that is incomplete. He explains this through the following parable: In order for the king to reward his loyal subject for his service, he allows him to enter into his royal treasury and take whatever his heart desires but only for a period of five minutes. The subject is joyful and thankful that he will be allowed to take whatever he wants from the royal treasury. However, he is also anguished by the time constraint he is given because he understands the opportunity at hand.

Similarly, King David rejoiced over the *Torah* that he was given because he understood its infinite value. However, at the same time he was distressed by the fact that he was restricted to seventy years and would not be able to partake of this treasure beyond that point. With this explanation we can understand why the *Torah* uses the term “*sos*” to express G-d’s joy and not the term “*simcha*.” G-d loves the Jewish people to such a degree that even though so much blessing is bestowed upon us, He is pained that He could not give us more.

Since G-d is infinite with no restrictions, He wants to provide us with boundless blessing as well but because of our own limitations, He is unable to do so. If G-d loves the Jews to such a degree that it gives him pain not to be able to do more for us, then we should understand that when He denies us His Goodness, it is clearly in our best interest. Now we can somewhat appreciate the idea that because of G-d’s unending love for us that even when we experience a set back in life we can understand that it emanates from His Goodness and not from vindictiveness. If He could give us more, He would.

Mishna: “Just as one blesses G-d for good fortune, he must bless Him for misfortune.” Because of his unlimited love for the Jewish people, He does only what is good and necessary for us.

Reb Chaim of Volozhin z'tl: If punishment and suffering are necessary as part of the rehabilitative spiritual process (which is only in our best interest), then why should one pray to G-d to heal him when he becomes ill? Does one ask the doctor to withhold a life-saving procedure when the only road to recovery is through that procedure? If so, then how do we understand the blessing of the *Amidah* which says, “Heal us *Hashem* and allow us to recover”?

Reb Chaim: Although G-d brings illness upon a person as part of the rehabilitation of his spirituality (which is a positive thing), G-d is nevertheless affected by the

fact that the Jew is in a state of suffering. It is similar to a parent who needs to assist the doctor when he performs a painful procedure to his child. The parent is joyful that the child will recover through this procedure; however, the parent feels the hurt of his child.

Reb Chaim: If one prays for healing because he feels G-d’s pain (as a father to a child – and even to a greater degree) then that feeling itself becomes the rehabilitative process that causes the person to be deserving of recovery. One can only relate to G-d’s pain (when a Jew is in a state of suffering) if one understands to what degree G-d loves the Jewish people.

Accept Upon Yourself My Kingship

Rosh Hashanah is the day of Judgment when G-d’s exacting justice comes upon all existence. Every living being is judged for life or death for the coming year. G-d’s judgment is so intense at this time that even the angels in heaven tremble from it. One would think that at such a time, when standing in judgment, one should repent and supplicate G-d for forgiveness. Nevertheless, in the prayer service of *Rosh Hashanah* there is no mention of confession or repentance. In fact, one does not discuss anything relating to himself, but rather, one only prays for the glory of G-d and His Kingship in existence. Why is this so?

Chazal: On the day of Judgment, *satan* is permitted to come before G-d and prosecute the Jewish people. The only way his prosecution can be silenced is with the blowing of the *shofar*. The sounding of the *shofar* has the ability to silence *satan* because it reminds G-d of the *Akeidah* (binding of *Yitzchak*). Although *Avraham* was willing to slaughter his only beloved son, *Yitzchak* for G-d, at the last moment an angel called to him from heaven and told him to withdraw his hand from the lad.

Soon after, *Avraham* saw a ram caught in the thicket near by, and he immediately understood that it there for him to actualize the service of the *Akeidah*. He was to slaughter the ram in the stead of *Yitzchak*. Because of *Avraham*’s level of dedication and self-negation for the sake of G-d even the most intense prosecution against the Jewish people will be silenced in the merit of the *Akeidah*, through the blowing of the *shofar*. This year, however, the first day of *Rosh Hashanah* coincides with the *Shabbos*.

The Rabbis legislated that the Jewish people are not permitted to blow the *shofar* when *Rosh Hashanah* falls on the *Shabbos*, because there may be an individual who is not proficient in its blowing and may transport the *shofar* four cubits in public domain in order to find someone who will instruct him how to blow it. At this particular time, how could *satan* be silenced if there is no *shofar* to counter his prosecution? In addition, why did the Rabbis suspend the blowing of the *shofar*, which is the mechanism to silence the prosecution of *satan* against the entire Jewish people, over a concern that an insignificantly small number of people may actually transport the *shofar* in public domain?

Reb Meir Simcha of Dvinsk: What silences *satan* is the Jew's dedication to G-d's glory. It was *Avraham's* negation of himself for the sake of carrying out the Will of G-d that silences *satan*. *Avraham* did not for a moment take into consideration his personal loss or the future of the Jewish people, who were destined to be led by his son *Yitzchak* the future Patriarch. The blowing of the ram's horn, reminds G-d of the sacrifice that was made on His behalf.

Identically, on the day of judgment, when the prosecution against the Jewish people is at an overwhelming level, it is fitting for them to negate their own needs for the sake of G-d's Honor and Glory. Our only concern on this day is the desecration of G-d's Name in the world because of the evil that exists. We supplicate Him to bring that to an end so that all humanity should recognize Him as The Master. By not addressing one's needs and focusing only on G-d, the King, this causes the Jew to be seen as a dedicated subject and servant of G-d, thus evoking the ultimate level of Mercy from Him.

Although the concern for an individual who may transport the *shofar* four cubits in public domain is seemingly inconsequential as compared to the whole picture; however, because the desecration of the *Shabbos* is a desecration of G-d we are willing to forfeit the opportunity to silence *satan* through the *shofar* and be seen in a positive light. Therefore, when *satan* comes before G-d on *Rosh Hashanah* and begins auditing the spiritual record of the Jewish people in the most incriminating manner, and there is no *shofar* to silence him, G-d will respond by telling him that the absence of the *shofar* is greater than the actual blowing because it demonstrates the ultimate sacrifice, that the Jewish people are willing to make on behalf of His Glory and Honor.

If one focuses on G-d's Glory and Kingship on *Rosh Hashanah* it will allow one to be the greatest beneficiary of the day. If G-d wants the Jewish people to acknowledge Him as their King and accept His Kingship, in fact He wants them to dedicate their lives to Him as His subjects. One must feel that he is no more than a chattel of G-d. This perspective and mindset is a basis for having a positive judgment on *Rosh Hashanah*.

One's Ascent Through Torah

Torah: "Moshe went (*vayeilech*) and spoke these words to all of Israel."

Midrash: "The term '*vayeilech* (went)' is an expression of rebuke. As it states, 'Go and see the wonders of G-d.'" What relevance does seeing the wonders of G-d have with to rebuke? How will gazing upon the majesty and awesomeness of existence, which is G-d's handiwork, cause rebuke? It is only after one witnesses and internalizes G-d's Omnipotence through creation, is one negated. This will cause one to recognize and appreciate his failings.

Midrash: "King Solomon writes, 'The words of the sages are similar to a cattle prodder.' The one who ploughs with the ox must insure that the ox does not veer to the right or to the left. If the ox should not walk the straight path it will break the blade of the plough in the ground. Identically, the words of the sages and the *Torah* direct the hearts of those who study it. By engaging in *Torah*, one will be led along the proper path of goodness."

Ramchal in Path of the Just: The desires and lusts of one's heart are the cause of the conflicts of interest that direct one away from the proper path. However based on this *Midrash*, if one studies *Torah* sufficiently, it will allow one to gain clarity and a perspective that will cause the heart to have an interest and appreciation for spirituality.

Midrash: Just as a nail is secure in the location in which it was implanted, so too do the words of *Torah* cause one to become secure and set in his position. The words of the sages are like plantings. Just as when one plants it blossoms and produces fruits, so too when one engages in the words of *Torah* do they blossom within the individual and cause him to come upon new understandings...

King Solomon: 'The nails (*masmeros*) are planted...' The word '*masmeros*' (nails) is usually written with the letter '*samoach*' however King Solomon writes it with the letter

'sin'. This is to teach us that there are twenty-four books in the *Torah* that correspond to the twenty-four watches of the Priests (*Kohanim*) established by King David (and *Shmuel* the prophet).

Gemara: Regarding officiating in the Temple, there were twenty-four families of *Kohanim* that would officiate for one week on a rotation basis. Thus, the word 'masmeros' (nails) can be read as 'mishmaros' (watches).

We find that there is a commonality between the *Torah* and the twenty-four week rotation service of the *Kohanim*. It was only the *Kohen* who was qualified to officiate in the Temple. The Tribe of *Levy* was the only tribe that did not participate in the sin of the Golden Calf and were thus not tainted with the impurity of idolatry. Because they were the most spiritually advanced of all the tribes, they were qualified to have a closer relationship with G-d.

Torah: The tribe of *Levy* did not receive a portion in the Land of Israel as the other tribes of Israel did, because "Hashem is their portion." Although the Levite was not as qualified as the *Kohen* to serve in the Temple, they nevertheless qualified for certain duties. Both the *Kohen* and the *Levy* were fully responsible to officiate in each of their own capacities.

Rambam at the end of the Laws of *Shmitta* and *Yovel*: Every person has the ability to ascend to the level of the tribe of *Levy* (although he will not be qualified to officiate in any capacity in the Temple). If one is motivated to pursue the understanding of G-d and be dedicated to officiate on His behalf and serve Him and to adhere to His Will and not to allow material concerns to distract him, as all mankind seeks out, this individual is sanctified to the ultimate level and G-d will be his portion forever. He will merit all that he needs in this world to maintain him as the *Kohen* and the *Levy*.

We see from *Rambam*, that one whose dedication to G-d is without compromise is valued by Him no less than the tribe of *Levy*. The *Midrash*, which refers to the *Torah* as 'masmeros' (nails) that secure, and can be read as 'mishmaros' (watches) implies that if one dedicates himself to study all of the (twenty-four) books of *Torah*, he will ascend to a level of spirituality that he will be valued by G-d as the *Kohen*, the one who is most qualified to officiate and serve, Him. The commonality that exists between the spiritual profile of the *Torah* and the profile of the twenty-four families who had officiated in the Temple gives us an insight and understanding that through one's own initiative, despite one's natural

limitation, one can achieve a level of relationship with G-d that is no less than a *Kohen*.

The Path to Repentance

Nitzavim: Regarding repentance, "...and you will return unto Hashem, your G-d, and listen to His voice, according to everything that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and all your soul... Hashem will circumcise your heart..."

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh: "When one repents he must make corrections in three areas. The first area that must be addressed is regarding one's study of *Torah*. How does one return to G-d and heed His voice? One must engage in *Torah* study. It is only through one's study of *Torah* that one can appreciate and internalize His Word. Thus, the first initiative that one must take in order to return to G-d is commit oneself to the study of *Torah* (to begin the spiritualization process). What will be the result of being committed to *Torah* study?"

"*Zohar*: 'In the merit of *Torah* study, the Jewish people will be redeemed.' We find that the destruction of the First Temple was directly caused by the absence of *Torah* study. As it states in the verse, 'They abandoned My *Torah*...' Therefore when the Jewish people commit to *Torah* study, they will be returned to the Land that was promised to them as their inheritance by G-d."

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh: "How does one repent for the transgression of a negative commandment? The verse states, 'Hashem will circumcise your heart...' It is known that one only violates a negative commandment because of the covering on one's heart (*orlas halev*) is the source of desire and lust and thus the cause of all evil. Therefore, G-d will circumcise one's heart and remove its covering. This will occur when one has sufficient love for G-d...How does one repent for transgressing a positive commandment? If one will perform all of the commandments..."

Rabbeinu Yonah in *Gates of Repentance*: The initial step in repentance is the recognition of the wrong that one had done. It is only after one senses his deficiency can one repent. This sensitivity to be able to introspect and reflect upon one's failings comes only through the study of *Torah*, without distraction. This does not mean that one must study continuously throughout the day in order to gain spiritual sensitivity. But rather, one must dedicate time to study without interruption.

Blessing of repentance in the *Amidah* (silent prayer): “Bring us back, our Father, to Your *Torah*, and bring us near, our King to Your service, and influence us to return in perfect repentance...” We see that the process of repentance first begins with the return to *Torah* study. This will allow the next stage of ascent to come about which is to be drawn near to the King in service.

We supplicate G-d every day in our prayers (*u’vah l’tzion*), “Open our hearts with Your *Torah*...” The key to open the Jewish heart to spirituality is only through *Torah* study. If the heart is sealed there is no receptivity or sensitivity for spirituality. The heart needs to be penetrated. As the verse states, “*Hashem* will circumcise your heart...”

Meaning, G-d will remove the blockage, which causes the heart to pursue lust and desire and prevents it from sensing the value of spirituality and absorbing it. Intellectual understanding of *Torah* concepts is not sufficient, but rather one’s objective in its study must be to give one a greater understanding of G-d’s Will. Only then will he merit Divine Assistance which will allow the *Torah* to penetrate his heart and make him receptive to His Word.

Gemara in Tractate *Shabbos*: “One who attempts to purify himself will be assisted.” If one beseeches G-d to allow his heart to be penetrated by *Torah* and is committed to its study, then he will become the greatest beneficiary of that pursuit. Thus he will become sensitive to his spiritual deficiencies to be able to make corrections and advancements.

The Jew’s Personalized Relationship with G-d

Haazinu: “For *Hashem*’s portion is His people; *Yaakov* is the rope (measure) of His inheritance....”

Rashi citing *Chazal*: “*Yaakov* is a third of the Patriarchs. He possesses within him three generations of merit: his father *Yitzchak*, his grandfather *Avraham* and his own. He is similar to a three-ply thread. Thus he is the measure of His inheritance.”

Sforno: “*Yaakov* is the rope (measure) of His inheritance” to mean, “He and his children are all subjects of G-d. If there is among the nations of the world one who is devoutly righteous, his righteousness is something which is isolated and limited to himself and will not be passed on to his progeny.” It is only among the Jewish people that one’s own status of purity will affect his lineage for future generations. The Jewish people

possess a spiritual gene-pool which emanates from the Patriarchs which gives them greater relevance to spiritual opportunity and growth. In addition, because of this linkage we are able to draw upon their merits.

First blessing of the *Amidah* (silent prayer): “Blessed are You *Hashem*, our G-d and the G-d of our forefathers, G-d of *Avraham*, G-d of *Yitzchak*, and G-d of *Yaakov*...” The only reason the Jew can refer to G-d as “His G-d” on a personal level is because of the linkages that exist between himself and the holy Patriarchs. It was through their service that they merited to establish a personal relationship with Him. As we see, G-d identifies Himself with each of them. Therefore, we being their descendants are linked to the Holy Patriarchs are able to have that same personal relationship with G-d.

Although one may be unworthy on a personal level, he still has relevance to the merits of the Patriarchs. The *Mishna* in Tractate *Shabbos* refers to the Jewish people as “princes, the children of kings.” They are seen as G-d’s children. Despite the fact that the Jew may fail, he remains the son of the King and thus can always be reinstated if he chooses to repent and return to the righteous path.

Reward is Unending

Gemara in Tractate *Sanhedrin*: “A child brings merit to his father (and forefathers).” All of the good deeds that are performed by a person accrue to the spiritual account of his parents. Because had it not been for them, he would not have come into existence to be able to perform the good deeds that he had. Although the parents may not have had any relevance to their child’s spiritual interest or development, the fact that they brought the child into existence is sufficient to allow them to be the beneficiaries, to some degree, of their child’s good deeds.

If the parent is the inspiration for the child to pursue a life of service to G-d then he will be an even greater beneficiary of merit. The *Gemara* continues, “However, a father, regardless of his dimension of righteousness will not bring merit to his child (after the child had passed away because the righteousness of the father is unrelated to the child.” Although one has the benefit of the merit of his antecedents to assist him in his spiritual ascent in Judaism, his share in the world to come is determined only by his own accomplishments.

Chofetz Chaim in his writings: If one provides what is needed to give a child a proper Jewish education and subsequently that child develops to be a true *Torah* observant person who establishes a family in conformance with the *Torah*, the one who contributed initially to the child's education will be the beneficiary of all the generations that will descend from this individual until the end of time. It is through that one act of providing for the child's *Torah* education that all that follows comes about. Had it not been for the benefactor's initiative there would not have been generations of *Torah* observant families.

Midrash in Haazinu: "The verse in *Devarim* states, 'Atone for your people Israel, that you have redeemed...' *Toras Kohanim* explains, 'That you have redeemed' is referring to those who have passed on. From here we learn that the living could bring redemption to those who passed away." When one performs a *mitzvah*, because of someone who is no longer alive, the merit generated by that *mitzvah* will accrue to the individual who passed away.

Midrash: "Therefore there is a tradition that those who are departed are remembered on *Yom Kippur* and one commits himself to give charity on their behalf. As the *Toras Kohanim* states, one may think that when one passes away charity will have no effect, the *Torah*

teaches us that although one may have passed away, he may still receive merit from those who are alive. These acts of goodness extricate those who passed away from their predicament and elevates him as an arrow that is shot from a bow. He immediately becomes supple and cleansed like a young kid. He will be purified as the moment that he was born...He will eat from the Tree of Life continuously that is planted in the area of the devoutly righteous and he will live eternally."

Mishna in Ethics of our Fathers: "At the end of time there will be a judgment and a computation." Seemingly, the sequence of the procedure is difficult. One may think that the computation needs to precede the judgment because the judgment is based on one's record. Why is this not the order?

Rabbi Y. I. Rudderman z'tl (Baltimore *Rosh HaYeshivah*): The judgment that is mentioned in the *Mishna* is definitely preceded by a computation to determine the individual's fate. However, after that judgment is established there is an ongoing computation until the end of time regarding the individual who had passed away. It is the ongoing effect (positive and negative) that his actions and decisions had on other people's lives that effects existence until the end of time. This is the computation that follows one's death.



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