

EXPRESSING JOY ON THE DAY OF JUDGMENT

In his book *Kovetz Sichos*, the great tzaddik Rabbi Nosson Wachtfogel Zatzal states that every holiday deals with a particular subject. On Passover we celebrate the exodus from Egypt, on Shavuot we commemorate the giving of the Torah, on Sukkot we observe the mitzvah of dwelling in a sukkah, and on Rosh Hashanah we experience fear and apprehension at the magnitude of the judgment. In fact in the Unetaneh Tokef prayer we recite, "The angels quake with fear and trembling...for not even they are innocent in Your eyes!" The day of judgment is an awe-inspiring day, one that we have good reason to fear. Nevertheless, we read in Nehemiah's proclamation: "Go, eat rich foods and drink sweet beverages, and send portions to those who have nothing prepared, for today [Rosh Hashanah] is sacred to our G-d. Do not be sad. The enjoyment of the L-RD is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10). It is clear from the words of Nehemiah that Rosh Hashanah is a day of joy and celebration. We therefore need to explain how this could be in keeping with the fear of the judgment, which is among the duties of the day.

Let's see how we can explain it. It may be compared to a person who committed an offense against a great king. The person constantly strives to meet the king in order to ask for his forgiveness, since he can no longer tolerate the pain of having disobeyed him. As for the king, he has absolutely no desire to meet with him, and therefore he completely ignores him. Thus the person's sorrow grows each time he sees the king, especially since he realizes that the king is still supporting him and enabling him to live expense free. Furthermore, his offense has still not been forgiven. However were the king to suddenly summon him, it is obvious he would be extremely happy. He would celebrate the fact that his monarch had finally called him to appear before him to give an accounting, for he finds it very difficult to live as a ward of the state. True, he would fear the outcome of the king's judgment, yet he would console himself with the thought that although he offended the king and irritated him by his actions, the king has still not punished him. In

fact he still continues to ensure his sustenance! This is why, by preparing himself in terms of how to speak to the king and what supplications to offer him, there is still a good chance he may be acquitted.

The meaning of this parable is clear. Although we have often irritated the Creator of the world by our deeds and are therefore quite far from Him, He still does not hide Himself from us, the Jewish people. He acts mercifully with us and enables the Jewish people to live by the merit of their ancestors, for we have sinned so greatly that even our prayers no longer bear fruit in Heaven. When He finally summons us in judgment, we must remember and understand what Nehemiah said: "Go, eat rich foods and drink sweet beverages, and send portions to those who have nothing prepared, for today is sacred to our G-d. Do not be sad. The enjoyment of the L-RD is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10).

It is true that in one respect Rosh Hashanah is a terrible day of judgment, for who knows what our verdict will be? It is therefore appropriate for us to tremble at the magnitude of the judgment. However it is also appropriate for us to rejoice on this day. Why should we rejoice? It is because in the final analysis, we have remained alive all year long, thank G-d, and Hashem has shown us His goodness, even if it was hidden. Hence on this day, when He wants to meet us in judgment, it is a sign that He has no desire to reject us. Who knows, perhaps He will show us favor on this day! That is why we should rejoice, which is not inconsistent with the fear of the day.

We must bear in mind, however, that a ferocious war unfolds against our accusers on Rosh Hashanah, accusers that were created by our sins. We have reason to fear that on this holy day we might lose hope of being able to prepare ourselves for the judgment. This may happen because we know that we have nothing to stem their accusations and defeat them, for their case is solid and they are a thousand times stronger than us. This is especially true since they are justified in saying that we deliberately transgressed many mitzvot, that we have been negligent in studying

Torah, and so on. The fact that we cannot counter these allegations fills us with great fear.

However it is precisely for this reason that we must rejoice on this day. In this way we will stymie all our accusers, for they will not understand what is happening to us, nor why we are rejoicing instead of weeping and worrying over our fate. In fact almost nobody takes our side, and even the Patriarchs are a little disappointed in our conduct throughout the year. Therefore all the angels of destruction and everything created by our sins are shocked at our joy. Thus it is written: "When you go out to battle" (Deuteronomy 20:1) – to defend yourself on the day of judgment, which is Rosh Hashanah – "and see horses and chariots...you shall not fear them." In other words, do not fear any of your accusers on this day, even if their very existence proves that you have sinned. Continue to confound them by your joy, for the more you persevere in your joyful service of Hashem, the more your accusers will be confounded. When the shofar is sounded, it above all else has the power to confound your accusers, and little by little they will be destroyed. All this will occur when the Satan sees that the Children of Israel are sometimes seated and sometimes standing during the sounding of the shofar, unable to understand what this all means. That is, if the sounding of the shofar has the goal of breaking our hearts, why do we remain seated, and if it does not have the goal of breaking our hearts, why do we stand? The answer is that when the Jewish people repent and all the angels created by their sins disappear, the Satan has no further reason to accuse them. This is truly an act of kindness on Hashem's part.

As a result, whoever has a head on his shoulders will understand the meaning of all this. He will fear the judgment on one hand, while on the other hand he will rejoice over the fact that Hashem loves demonstrating kindness and doing good for us at all times, especially when our accusers are standing at the ready to accuse us. If we serve G-d in joy and with love, we will merit a year that is both good and blessed, and we will be inscribed and immediately sealed for a good year. Amen, may it be so!

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

How to be Acquitted in the Judgment

At the end of his book *Sefer Charedim*, Rabbi Eliezer Azkari Zatzal states the following:

We must look for inexpensive remedies for the soul. In fact illnesses of the soul are very much like illnesses of the body, and sometimes a doctor will prescribe an expensive remedy with all sorts of costly ingredients, while for a few cents we can find herbs that will do the same thing. I've heard from a reliable source about something that happened in Castile. One of the king's ministers went hunting and ended up being bitten on the leg by a fox. Since the bite was small, he hardly felt any pain. On the second day, however, his leg began to swell, and on the third day it was extremely inflamed, to the top of his thigh. The royal physicians tried using various remedies, every one of which was costly, yet they all proved ineffective. They began fearing for his life at that point, and the minister's family began weeping.

An Arab who worked in a distant estate came to the minister with a gift, something that he usually did. Upon seeing the tragic state of his master as he lay ill, he asked what had happened to him, since he had been in good health only three days earlier.

When the Arab was told that a tiny bite from a fox caused this disaster, he said: "Don't worry. With G-d's help, I'll cure him!"

The Arab quickly went back to the countryside and began collecting some herbs whose medicinal properties he was aware of. He then ran to the minister's home, crushed the herbs, and applied them to his leg. The minister immediately began to feel better, and three days later he got up and began to walk! The royal physicians were dumbfounded, and they praised G-d for having created herbs with such healing properties.

The same applies to the soul, for we know many sick people who have found inexpensive remedies through a segula. So too must we look in the field that was blessed by Hashem – the holy Gemara – and search for segulot and simple remedies to heal our weakened souls, souls that no longer have the strength to support more radical remedies.

The following is just one example that we have found: "He who responds Amen yehei shemei rabba with all his might...even if he has a taint of idolatry, he is forgiven" (Shabbat 119b). The Zohar is very exacting and says that a person must use his entire body to respond with a loud voice. One who habitually does this is told that all his sins are forgiven if he abandons them. This is one segula.

The following is another: The Sages have said, "He who observes the Sabbath according to its laws – even if he practices idolatry like the generation of Enoch – is forgiven" (Shabbat 118b). Do not be troubled by trying to understand how his observance of Shabbat helped him to have his sins forgiven, for observing Shabbat is a mitzvah that we are obligated to observe. We must say that our intense zeal is what enables us to be forgiven, as in the act of responding Amen.

A third segula is the following: The Sages have said that whoever controls his natural instincts is forgiven of all sin. This is why a person who controls himself by thinking, "Why should I suffer for my sins in this world and then again in Gehinnom? Better to suffer human shame and humiliation without responding, and better to rejoice in my hardships" – regarding such a person Scripture states: "Those who love Him will be like the powerfully rising sun" (Judges 5:31).

A Pearl From the Rav

In his book *Pahad David*, Rabbi David Pinto Shlita states: On Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot we recite numerous prayers and supplications, and with each the congregation loudly exclaims Amen! In fact everyone should reflect on the Amen he utters, such as in responding to: "Open for us...the gates of light...the gates of Torah, the gates of prayer, the gates of teshuvah...." We must consider whether we truly want these wonderful gifts and if we are ready

to become vessels capable of holding abundant blessings. If we say Amen out of habit, what purpose does our response serve? How does it engage our strengths? By responding out of habit, by rote, we thereby make ourselves an object of derision. This is why we must greatly concentrate on the moment we hear a prayer and respond Amen with all our hearts. The Holy One, blessed be He, will then send us an abundance of good.

Hallel

Why do we refrain from reciting Hallel on Rosh Hashanah? The Gemara replies by saying: "Is it possible that the King should be sitting on the Throne of Justice, with the books of life and death open before Him, and Israel should be chanting hymns of praise?" (Rosh Hashanah 32b).

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev Zatzal provides us with an additional reason. When the Temple stood, the Levites sang with all their hearts in the presence of the entire people, who were filled with joy and song. At that time we lived within the palace of the King of the universe. However because of our sins, we have chosen to wander about in the dangerous forest. The Temple has been destroyed, we have been distanced from the palace of the King, and we are all occupied with our own problems. We have risked our lives by living in the forest, we have been afflicted with wounds and blows, and we no longer know the way back to the King's palace. We now recognize our sins and dearly wish to get back to Him, as in previous times. We dearly wish to be back in the palace of the King of the universe. This is why, on each of the three great holidays – when we clearly recall the marvelous palace that we once knew – this nostalgia takes hold of us and our souls yearn to return to G-d. Our hearts are filled with a yearning for our Father and King, and we once again sing in the forest of exile, just as in previous times. However the day of judgment will soon arrive, and we will suddenly find ourselves before the King. Therefore let us look for Hashem when He is nearby. Let us call upon Him when He is close at hand, during the ten days from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur. It is during this time that we perceive His revealed greatness and glory on one hand, while on the other hand we are aware of the accounting we must give. Our mouths are therefore silenced, and it is impossible to sing.

On Rosh Hashanah, "The Enjoyment of the L-RD is your Strength"

The Tur states: "Normally, a person who knows that he is going to be judged will wear black clothing, let his beard grow unkempt, and not cut his nails. ... Yet we don't do so. We wear white clothing, trim our hair, and cut our nails. On Rosh Hashanah we eat, drink, and are happy, for we know that the Almighty will perform miracles with us" (Tur, Orach Chaim 581).

The Maggid of Dubno asks how we can wear festive clothing and eat a festive meal while our very lives hang in the balance. How can we do this when our entire fate will be decided: Our life, health, peace and sustenance, happiness and tranquility!

This is like two ministers who were judged before the king for some offense they committed, and who were both condemned to death. The king gave them time to go back home and put their affairs in order, with the king's officers being commanded to bring them back for execution at the appointed time.

When the royal officers went to get them, one of the ministers looked distraught, his eyes red with tears and refusing to return and face death. The second minister, however, was walking with an air of assurance and his head held high, as if nothing was going to happen. The distraught minister asked the other if he understood the gravity of the situation, for the king himself was both judge and jury! "That's true," said the confident minister. "However that's the bright spot in this whole affair. While you were weeping, I was imploring the viceroy. He in turn spoke to the king on our behalf, and in his great kindness the king said that if we expressed our regrets over our offense, he would forgive us! That's why I feel confident, for my fate depends on no one but myself! If my regrets and contrition are real, I'll be acquitted!" When his fellow minister heard that, a smile erupted on his face, and his spirits revived as well.

The message of this parable is clear.

For the Sin That We Committed Before You by Greed

The Maggid of Kozhnitz once hosted a wealthy man who was complaining about the needy who came to him begging for money, comparing them to leeches.

The Maggid turned to his wealthy guest and reprimanded him: "What I'm about to say concerns you and your complaints about the poor. If I were in your place and I understood the providence and goodness of Hashem, I would ask Him to forgive me for what I've said. I would never describe the poor as leeches. In fact the Midrash says, 'The door that is not opened for good deeds will be opened for the doctor' [Shir Hashirim 6:11§1]. If it has been decided that a person must give up his surplus money – money that Heaven decided he has in excess – better that these 'leeches' should take it from him in an easy and painless way than he should be forced to hand it over in a difficult and painful manner."

Rosh Hashanah and the Exodus from Egypt

In the Kiddush for Rosh Hashanah we say, "This day of remembrance, the festival of holy assembly, a day for sounding the shofar, a holy assembly commemorating the exodus from Egypt."

The author of Yismach Moshe, Rabbi Moshe Teitelbaum of Ujhel Zatzal, asks: What connection is there between Rosh Hashanah and the exodus from Egypt?

At the time of the exodus from Egypt, the people had sunk to the 49th gate of impurity, and the attribute of justice was accusing them: "These here [the Egyptians] are idolaters, and these here [the Jews] are idolaters" (Zohar II: 170b). However the Holy One, blessed be He, disregarded this. He did not require that we merit to be saved, but that we desire to follow Him from then on. Those who did not want this perished during the three days of darkness, while the others asked G-d to draw them to Him – they wanted to run to Him – and they were saved by miracles and wonders aimed at their eternal freedom. Similarly, on Rosh Hashanah we ask that Hashem will permit us to say: Although we do not merit it, Hashem our G-d, give us this day of remembrance, this day of the sounding of the shofar, when You will announce that anyone who wants to repent may do so – just as in the past – on condition that we follow You from now on. We must remember the exodus from Egypt as if it happened in our time!

Who May Ascend?

It is written, "Who may ascend the mountain of the L-RD? One...who has not lifted up My soul in vain" (Psalms 24:3-4). The Chafetz Chaim used a parable to explain this passage: A man came to his friend and asked to borrow 500 rubles for the year, an enormous amount of money for him. However being that it was a mitzvah to help the poor, he loaned him the money. After a year the person came to his friend's home to collect his loan. The borrower welcomed him in, and then he opened up a drawer and gave him back the very same 500 rubles that he had borrowed. "You don't have to worry about counting it," he said. "It was never touched."

The lender was shocked. "How could this be? Was it for this reason that I lent you such an enormous amount of money – so you could stash it away at the bottom of your drawer? I lent you this money in order to help you!"

A person receives good character traits and abilities from Heaven, all meant to help him purify his soul. However by leaving them in some "drawer" – even if it hurts no one – he undermines the reason they were given to him! One who lifts up his soul in vain, without purifying it, does not deserve to ascend the mountain of Hashem.

– Sha'arei Armon

A MATTER OF EDUCATION

Your Righteousness Will Precede You

The Gemara relates the following stories:

Benjamin the tzaddik was a supervisor of a charity fund. One day a woman came to him in a year of scarcity and said to him: "Sir, assist me." He replied, "I swear, there is not a penny in the charity fund." She said, "Sir, if you do not assist me, a woman and her seven children will perish." He accordingly assisted her out of his own pocket. Some time afterwards he became dangerously ill. The angels addressed the Holy One, blessed be He, saying: "Sovereign of the universe, You have said that he who preserves one soul of Israel is considered as if he had preserved the whole world. Therefore should Benjamin the tzaddik, who saved a woman and her seven children, die at so early an age?" Straightway his sentence was torn up. It has been taught that twenty-two years were added to his life.

Our Rabbis taught: It is related of King Monobaz that he gave away all his own riches and the riches of his fathers in years of scarcity. His brothers and his father's household came in a deputation to him and said to him, "Your father saved money and added to the treasures of his fathers, and you are squandering them." He replied, "My fathers stored up below and I am storing above, as it says: 'Truth will sprout from the earth and righteousness will peer from Heaven' [Psalms 85:12]. My fathers stored in a place that can be tampered with, but I have stored in a place that cannot be tampered with, as it says: 'Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne' [Psalms 97:2]. My fathers stored something that produces no fruit, but I have stored something that does produce fruit, as it is written: 'Tell the righteous that it is good, for they shall eat the fruit of their deeds' [Isaiah 3:10]. My fathers gathered treasures of money, but I have gathered treasures of souls, as it is written: 'The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and the wise man gathers souls' [Proverbs 11:30]. My fathers gathered for others and I have gathered for myself, as it says: 'For you it will be an act of righteousness' [Deuteronomy 24:13]. My fathers gathered for this world, but I have gathered for the future world, as it says: 'Your righteousness will precede you and the glory of the L-RD will be your reward' [Isaiah 58:8]."

– Bava Batra 11a

EISHET CHAYIL

The Merit of the Widow

When Rabbi Aryeh Leib Ginsburg (the author of Sha'agat Aryeh) was forced to leave Minsk, he experienced a period of poverty and destitution.

He didn't even have a Talmud at home during that time, and he was forced to borrow one. This was not an easy thing to do during that era, since anyone who possessed a Talmud at home needed it for himself. The Sha'agat Aryeh eventually learned that a widow who lived in his neighborhood owned a complete Talmud, which was considered extremely valuable at the time. Due to that fact, the widow guarded her Talmud very carefully, since the memory of her husband soothed her heart and gave her courage every time she looked at it. Rabbi Aryeh Leib pleaded with the widow to lend him her Talmud, until finally she accepted. Nevertheless, he could only borrow one tractate at a time. Whenever he knew a tractate by heart, he returned it to her and borrowed another in its place. Realizing that it would be a long time before he ever borrowed the same tractate again, he studied it thoroughly and repeatedly – over and over again – until he knew it inside and out. Rabbi Aryeh Leib affirmed that a great part of his Torah learning was due to the merit of that widow.

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

The Rosh Hashanah Service

How should a person serve Hashem on Rosh Hashanah? The Maggid of Dubno gives us a parable to help answer this question. Our situation is comparable to that of a poor man with a son who was endowed with all kinds of abilities. He wanted to find a wife for his son and see him happy. However he needed money for that to happen, and the poor fellow had very little of it!

One day a wealthy man addressed himself to him and said, "I've spoken with your son, and I like him very much. I have a daughter who has many fine character traits, and I'm ready to take your son as my son-in-law. I'm also willing to take care of everything for the wedding...well, almost everything. All you have to do is make your son a proper suit. That's it!" Upon hearing that, the poor man exclaimed, "Excellent! However I don't even have a penny, not even for a suit."

"I'm not offering more," said the wealthy man. "You have to do something for your part."

The poor man asked, "Give me ten days to see what I can do." The wealthy man agreed. Thus the poor man began to knock on people's doors and asked them for money, yet no one offered. Filled with bitterness, he returned home a beaten man.

Later on that day, the wealthy man received a knock on his door. His servant answered and said that someone wanted to speak to him. "Let him in," the wealthy man said.

Who should walk through the door but the poor father of the groom-to-be! "Already?" the wealthy man asked. "You've already found enough money?"

"Actually, I haven't," he replied.

"Then why are you here?" he shot back. "You still have ten more days!"

"True," the poor man said. "However that why I've come. You see, I really wanted to return in ten days with the money for my son's suit. However because I know that it will be impossible for me to find it, I've come to you now. I'm not here as a future in-law, but as a poor person who has come to a wealthy man with a generous heart. I beg you, please open your hand and give me a donation!"

The message of this parable is that we are like this poor man. We are the ones who have a large amount to collect, yet are unable to do so. That is, we ask Hashem to forgive all the sins that we have committed, and we are asking for a good and joyous year. However we cannot pay in mitzvot and good deeds, not even for a single day of joy!

However there exists a wonderful solution to our problem, for the Holy One, blessed be He, is ready to provide us with everything. He is ready to offer us forgiveness, atonement for sins, and a good year filled with light and joy. However there is one condition, which is that we must open our hearts and return to Him in complete repentance. In that day there will be atonement for sin and an opportunity to finally cleanse ourselves of all transgression, but only on condition that we purify ourselves before Hashem!

The gates of light lie open before us, but our hearts are numb and dark. We are therefore liable to lose this immense opportunity. What should we do? Let us do as this poor man in the parable did. Let us present ourselves to the Holy One, blessed be He, and ask Him for help. Let us ask Hashem to open our hearts in order to love and revere Him! This is the reason that Rosh Hashanah comes before Yom Kippur, and it is why the sound of the shofar makes our hearts tremble. It is to help us do our part, that we may be prepared on the holiest day of the year.

A TRUE STORY

The Honor of a Sage

The gaon Rabbi Haim Pinto (Hakatan) Zatzal was a young man when he decided to rest a little from the labor of his Torah studies. He therefore decided to travel to the harbor and watch the ships being unloaded. "Hey you – you Jew – what are you looking at? Don't you have somewhere to go?" an Arab dockworker shouted to him as he gave him a vicious slap across the face. Tears began to well up in his eyes at the pain of being struck and insulted. Rabbi Pinto's three friends, who were with him at the time, strongly recommended that they leave so as not to give the Arab more incentive to harass him. However Rabbi Pinto whispered, "Master of the Universe, I will not leave until you avenge the honor of my holy ancestors."

At that point the Arab let out a piercing cry and a frightful scream of agony. He began to writhe in pain and rolled around on the ground in his own blood. Rabbi Pinto's friends approached to see what was happening. It turned out that the Arab was holding a rope that was wrapped around his hand, a rope attached to a heavy load on the other end. Somehow this load had suddenly moved, which in turn ripped off the hand of the Arab – the very same hand that had struck Rabbi Pinto! The injured dockworker was brought to the hospital, and there he had all the time in the world to think about what had happened, and why! On the day he left the hospital, he went to see Rabbi Pinto and asked him for forgiveness.

– Shoshelet Pinto

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi Meir Leibush – The Malbim

Rabbi Meir Leibush Zatzal was born in 5569 to the gaon Rabbi Yechiel Michael in Volochisk. Losing his father while still a child, he was raised by his stepfather Rabbi Aryeh Leib. From his youth he began to study books of wisdom and Kabbalah, receiving the main part of his education in Kabbalah from the Rebbe of Ziditchov, Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch. At the age of 27, Rabbi Meir Leibush composed his great work Artzot HaChaim on the Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim. This book received approbations from all the Torah giants of his generation, who heaped compliments on him.

In 5598 the Malbim (as Rabbi Meir Leibush became known) was named as the Rav and Av Beit Din of Wreschen, where he remained for many years and made numerous disciples. From there he moved to Kempen, and from there to Bucharest. In Bucharest he was the victim of a conspiracy and was imprisoned. However due to the intervention of Sir Moses Montefiore, the Malbim was freed. He was also appointed as the Rav of Lencziza in 5626, and later went on to become the Rav and Av Beit Din of Koenigsberg. Everywhere he went, the Malbim restored Judaism to its rightful place by enacting numerous decrees.

In his final year of his life, the Malbim served as the Rav of Kremenchug. However fate was not to smile on him there, for he fell ill and his soul ascended to Heaven on the first day of Rosh Hashanah 5640. Although the Malbim wrote many books, he is best known for his great work on the Torah and Tanach entitled Perush HaMalbim, a book that contains fascinating commentaries on almost every verse of the Bible, and which is frequently studied to this day. The memory of the tzaddik is truly a blessing.