

HOW GREAT ARE YOUR WORKS!

Each day in the Morning Prayer we recite, "Who in His goodness renews each day, continuously, the work of Creation." Every day Hashem renews the Creation that He brought into existence. However the language of this prayer seems to indicate that Hashem is not content with just renewing Creation each day. This in itself is something extraordinary: Day follows day, yet in His goodness Hashem is constantly renewing the work of Creation. Thus each day He does us this kindness.

Let us try and imagine what the world would resemble, and what we ourselves would be like, if Hashem had never renewed Creation. There's no way to picture it! As a result, by the fact of renewing Creation each day, Hashem demonstrates His kindness to us. What is the nature of this kindness? In this week's parsha, within the song Haazinu, we read of the great kindness and goodness that Hashem bestowed to His people Israel in comparison to the other nations. Among other things we read, "The Supreme One gave the nations their inheritance when He separated the children of man...for the L-RD's portion is His people; Jacob is the measure of His inheritance...He discovered him in a desert land...He would suckle him with honey from a stone and oil from a flinty rock" (Deuteronomy 32:8-10,13). This proves just how much good Hashem does for us, just to what point He protects His people Israel, and just to what extent He loves us more than the other nations, for they do nothing but constantly irritate Him.

However in the final analysis, are we really thinking about what we are saying? Do we understand, be it just a little, the wonders and kindnesses that Hashem demonstrates to us each day, continuously and at each instant?

To our great regret and shame, there are many people who simply deny the reality of the Creator. They claim that all things are part of nature, that everything occurs on its own, and that the world has no ruler! Some believe that Hashem ascended to the heights and has no interest in what His creations do below, since to them everything

happens by chance, as an everyday occurrence. Concerning such people the Gemara states, "One is allowed to follow the road he wishes to pursue" (Makot 10b). However we have more than enough to silence them.

We must realize that there is no reality to what people call "nature." We are told in sacred writings that hateva (nature) has the same numerical value as Elokim. This means that nature itself was created by G-d. If we do not instill this realization into our hearts and minds, however, we will end up denying Hashem and all His works, for nature and Hashem are like two inseparable friends.

However there are two aspects to nature itself, and indeed to all of Creation, for all things were created in this way. There is mercy on one hand, since Hashem shows mercy to the Jewish people and guides the world according to kindness and mercy, and there is justice on the other. This means that when the Jewish people do not act as they should, Hashem guides the world according to the attribute of justice and is uncompromising. That being the case, no one can emerge innocent.

Justice and mercy are found with each separate individual. Sometimes we see that things are all working out for the best, such as when our work is flourishing, when we derive satisfaction from life, and so on. This is because at that moment the Holy One, blessed be He, is dealing with us according to the attribute of mercy. Conversely, we sometimes have the definite impression that "things aren't right," that everything is going wrong. Why does this happen?

As we have said, when things are going wrong, when the Torah is not penetrating our minds and we are facing problems and misfortunes, we must realize that the Holy One, blessed be He, is dealing with us according to the attribute of justice. Yet at the same time, we need to understand that we must still thank Him regardless of the attribute He uses in dealing with us. As our Sages have said concerning King David's statement, "I will raise the cup of salvation and call upon the Name of the L-RD" (Psalms 116:13): "I found trouble and sorrow, but I called upon the Name of the L-RD" (Berachot

60b). We no doubt believe that to arrive at such a point, we must be at a certain spiritual level. Yet in reality, this is completely not true. In our parsha it is written, "When I proclaim the name of the L-RD, ascribe greatness to our G-d" (Deuteronomy 32:3). That is, at first the verse employs the Name that corresponds to the attribute of mercy, followed by the Name corresponding to the attribute of justice. From here we learn that even when justice prevails, we must nevertheless render homage to Hashem and thank Him.

We may still ask, despite all this, how we can thank and glorify G-d when we are struck by strict justice. That is, when things (in general and specifically) are not going well, our minds find it hard to tolerate and our daily routine is disrupted. Therefore how can we thank Hashem during such times?

This is why we said at the outset that each day Hashem renews the work of Creation. Now just what is "the work of Creation"? Everyone must realize that "the world was created for my sake" (Sanhedrin 37a). Each person must be conscious of what the Sages said, namely that the whole world was created for the sake of the Jewish people. At the same time, we must also remember that the world was created for something else, since it was created for two things called reshith ("beginning"): Israel and the holy Torah. If the Torah would no longer be studied, the world would revert to chaos. Without Torah, there would be no reason for having a world. However with Torah, everything transforms into mercy.

How does all this happen? The Torah stems entirely from mercy, and when a person studies Torah he fully understands that everything emanates from G-d and that everything is very good – that even strict justice is a form of mercy – since by the Torah we can transform justice into mercy. It is precisely through the Torah that we may see how different we are from the other peoples, as stated in this week's parsha: "He set the borders of the peoples according to the number of the Children of Israel" (Deuteronomy 32:8). When the Jewish people do G-d's will, He does their will and sends them good in abundance.

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

The Importance of Reflecting Upon the Day of Death

“Were they wise, they would understand this. They would discern what their end would be” (Deuteronomy 32:29). The Alter of Kelm explains that from here we learn the obligation of encouraging people to reflect upon the day of death. “Were they wise, they would understand this” – if people conducted themselves wisely, they would ask for an understanding of certain things. What understanding would that be? It would concern “what their end would be.” This refers to bettering their understanding of the hereafter, as well as being concerned with it. The Sages have said, “Repent one day before your death” (Perkei Avoth 2:10). Yet can a person know when he will die?

We should therefore repent today, lest we die tomorrow. In this way all our days will be lived in a spirit of repentance. We clearly see how death carries away countless people with each passing day. Hence it seems logical that people would be filled with dread concerning their souls, constantly worried about their eventual demise. However this is not the case, for people normally regard themselves as unlikely candidates to leave this world anytime soon. Let us think about this attitude for a moment. If a king were to punish the residents of a city by proclaiming that two of its residents would be subjected to unimaginable torture for an entire month, an incredible fear would descend upon its inhabitants. Everyone would be trembling for fear of being among the two selected by the king for torture. Everyone would be looking for ways to find favor in the king’s eyes and avoid punishment.

Therefore why are we not seized with the same fear with regards to the King of kings? Rabbi Yehoshua Heller Zatzal explains that the reason a person’s senses are not afraid of the terrible punishment that awaits him is because they have never experienced the bitterness of death. Hence they cannot imagine what it is like. However intellectually, we know perfectly well that such punishment exists and we fully believe in it.

Rabbi Heller states, “It is therefore incumbent upon us to constantly look for ways and means to infuse our hearts with a true picture of the coming storm, and to add the rationalizations of the mind to the feelings of the soul. This is in order to infuse the heart with a tendency to reject character faults, or at the very least to minimize them, thereby preventing opportunities for sin from establishing themselves in a person.” Rabbi Avraham adds that we learn the following from the aforementioned statement in Perkei Avoth: “If a person were to be told that today is his last complete day and that tomorrow he will die, he would certainly put all his affairs into order. He would forget about his worries and completely turn his heart towards repentance and serving G-d. He wouldn’t let an instant pass him by without doing something, and he would put all his efforts into accumulating as much spiritual merit as possible.” According to the Sages, this is how everyone should constantly act: He must imagine that this is his last complete day on earth, that he will die tomorrow. He will then live his entire life in a spirit of repentance.

Changes Will Come

“May my teaching drop like the rain. May my utterance flow like the dew, like storm winds upon vegetation and like raindrops upon blades of grass” (Deuteronomy 32:2).

Rabbi Simcha Bunim of Pshischa said, “Rain obviously has a beneficial effect on all fruits and vegetables, even if we perceive no immediate results. Similarly, when we learn Torah there is no doubt that, even if we perceive no immediate changes in ourselves, the results will still come.”

Appearances May Be Deceiving

“The Rock – perfect is His work, for all His paths are justice; a G-d of faith without iniquity. Righteous and fair is He” (Deuteronomy 32:4).

The Chafetz Chaim said that we sometimes see the righteous suffering without understanding why. He recounts that there was once a boy who became seriously ill. A skilled physician was brought in to examine him, and he discovered that the boy couldn’t eat certain foods. He therefore had to avoid them at all cost. One day the boy’s father traveled to a distant land, leaving instructions for his son’s care. However the boy took advantage of his father’s absence and began eating what was prohibited to him. The result was that he ended up sick in bed.

Once again the skilled physician was called in, and after much effort he managed to cure the boy. The man hosted a meal in order to give thanks for his son’s recovery, and when the boy arrived at the table his father got upset and sent him away. Everyone thought that he was being cruel to the boy, since he invited everyone else but didn’t give any food to this boy, his own son! The father explained to his guests that his son could not eat such food, and it was therefore better for him to leave the table.

Thus a person does not know what is truly good for him, and Hashem in His Mercy may “send him away,” which is just what he really needs.

No Artist Like Hashem

On the verse, “There is no Rock like our G-d” (I Samuel 2:2), the Sages have said: “There is no artist [tzayar] like our G-d” (Megillah 14a; Berachot 10a).

The Rav of the village of Matityahu noted that it takes a child only a few seconds to make a drawing of a person. He depicts his head by a circle and his limbs by some lines – and that’s it, his drawing is done! However when a great artist creates a portrait, it can take months to complete. He must first purchase his canvas, mix his colors, and only then does he go ahead and begin his work. What we see at first is a rough sketch of colored lines. If we were to ask the artist why he seems to be doodling, he would say: “I’m not a child making a drawing. Come back in six months and you’ll see why.”

If we were to return not in six, but in three months, we would see that the chaos on the canvas has only increased! The artist would say, “I told you to come back after six months! Has anyone ever exhibited work that was halfway complete?” When we see the final product, however, its beauty will amaze us. The same applies to Hashem: “There is no artist like our G-d” – His masterpiece takes 6,000 years to complete.

Imagine someone coming at an intermediate point in Hashem’s work and saying, “I don’t understand what’s happening here! Why is this person rich and that one poor, this one gifted and that one lacking, this one orphaned and that one not?” To such a person we would say, “Come back at the end, when His work is finished, and then you will see that ‘There is no artist like our G-d.’”

The Chafetz Chaim compared this to a guest arriving at a certain synagogue for the first time and seeing the Shamash giving aliyahs to people seated throughout the synagogue. Someone seated to the west is given the third aliyah, while someone seated at the back of the eastern section is given the fourth aliyah. As for the Shamash himself, he is circling around the synagogue from one end to the next.

At the end of the service this guest tells the Shamash, “I have some advice to give you. One Shabbat you should give aliyahs to those sitting in the first row, and so on for the following weeks. Why run from one end of the synagogue to the other? Why all this lack of order?” The Shamash replied, “In fact there is an order to the aliyahs I give: One person is observing a yahrzeit, the second is marrying off his son, the third has just returned from a voyage and is saying hagomel...”

We cannot come to synagogue for just one week and understand everything that is going on. A person who lives only 70 years has many questions. Perhaps he might understand things if he lived 1,000 years!

Forbidden Forgetfulness

“You ignored the Rock Who gave birth to you and forgot G-d Who brought you forth” (Deuteronomy 32:18).

The Maggid of Dubno recounted the following parable: Someone was walking outside when he came to his friend’s store. He went inside and asked his friend, the owner of the store, how he was doing. The owner replied, “Things are very difficult. I have no money to purchase new merchandise, and what I manage to sell, I sell at a loss!” His friend said to him, “Don’t forget – you owe me \$10,000!” The owner replied, “Are you the only one whom I owe? I’m indebted to many others, but I just don’t know what to do.” His friend said to him, “Look, I have an idea: Tonight, take all your merchandise and move it out of town, then set your store on fire. In the morning, stand in front of the charred remains and start weeping. That way you’ll get the insurance money and still keep all your merchandise! You’ll no longer be in debt!” Thus his friend passed by the store the next day and saw it burnt to the ground and its remains covered in soot. Seeing the owner standing nearby and weeping aloud, he approached him and said, “Don’t forget the \$10,000 you owe me.” His friend replied, “What are you talking about! My store just burned down!” He shot back: “You can’t use that excuse with me! I’m the one who told you to do this!” Thus the Holy One, blessed be He, says: “I gave you forgetfulness that you may live, otherwise a person would never forget his troubles, nor his loved ones who have died, and he would be unable to function. Yet you have used this power of forgetfulness to forget Me!”

The Conclusion of the Days of Judgment

The days of judgment last from Rosh Hashanah until after Shemini Atzeret, when the final royal seal is set and the decree placed into the hands of the messengers, according to Rabbi Menachem Azaryah of Pano. During these 22 days, all who believe in Hashem tremble in fear because of this awe-inspiring time.

– Chatam Sofer, Derashot 23

EISHET CHAYIL

Transparent Clothing in the Home

In the home, a woman must also be careful not to wear garments that are transparent. She must do this for several reasons:

1. To allow family members to speak words of holiness, such as blessings, prayers, words of Torah, and so on in her presence.
2. To show respect for the members of her family, particularly if there are older boys in the home. They will be hindered in their spiritual progress for many years by negligence in this area.
3. To prevent the beams of her house from seeing her dressed immodestly, since it is a mitzvah for a woman not to wear transparent garments even when no one is home. This is what Kimchit did, for the beams of her house never saw even a single strand of her hair (Yoma 47a). Rabbeinu Chananel explains that Kimchit was extremely modest, which means that women must dress modestly even when there is no risk of making others sin. May all Jewish women become accustomed to dressing modestly at all times and in every situation.

A MATTER OF EDUCATION

Sukkot – Daily Living After Teshuvah

In Parsha Emor, after the commandment concerning Rosh Hashanah, we have the commandments concerning Yom Kippur and the holiday of Sukkot. In both cases the Torah uses the expression “this seventh month.” The word “this” stresses that it is the same month in which Rosh Hashanah occurs. Accordingly, these two holidays – Yom Kippur and Sukkot – are a follow-up to Rosh Hashanah. In the book of Ezekiel, however, it is stated: “On Rosh Hashanah, on the tenth of the month” (Ezekiel 40:1), from which we learn that Yom Kippur is not a follow-up to Rosh Hashanah, but rather a part of it. In other words, the ten first days of the seventh month are all considered to be like Rosh Hashanah, a period that begins with the Day of Remembrance and ends with the Day of Atonement. Furthermore, insofar as the holiday of Sukkot is concerned (which the Torah deals with immediately after the subject of Yom Kippur), we are not told that it is a mitzvah to live in a sukkah because Hashem had our ancestors live in one. Instead, we are simply told of the holiday of Sukkot. It is only afterwards, in an address that Hashem makes to Moses following the mitzvah of the four species, that we find the mitzvah to live in a sukkah. From this we learn that regarding the holiday of Sukkot, there also exists the general notion of a year-end festival. This is stated near the end of Parsha Mishpatim: “The festival of the Harvest at the close of the year” (Exodus 23:16) and near the end of Parsha Ki Tisa: “The festival of the Harvest shall be at the changing of the year” (ibid 34:22). That is, we must celebrate before Hashem regarding the entire year that He has given us. From this we find a common view expressed in sacred books, which is that the primary time for teshuvah lasts until Hoshana Rabba, an idea that is rooted in the heart of the Jewish people.

This period of teshuvah, which begins in earnest at Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur – when “the books of life and death are opened before Him” – become intertwined with days of great celebration that relate to the entire year. Even though the start of this period of teshuvah is solemn and expresses itself through reverential fear, its end expresses itself in joy before Hashem.

An education message lies within this concept. There are some people who take time out from their lives to deeply reflect and engage in soul-searching during the Days of Awe. Then they return to their daily routine after having made decisions made during that time. Nevertheless, they do not continue to engage in this introspection once they have returned to their daily routine. From the festival of Sukkot we learn that we should extend the soul-searching we did during those days until they become intertwined with the joy of life. In this way our teshuvah will be put to the test of daily living and last throughout the year.

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

Accepting Heaven's Judgments with Love

It is written, "The Rock – perfect is His work, for all His paths are justice; a G-d of faith without iniquity. Righteous and fair is He" (Deuteronomy 32:4).

We need to understand what is so surprising about the fact that G-d's judgments are "without iniquity." Would we find it acceptable for a judge of flesh and blood to have judgments that are unfair? Rabbi Yitzchak Blazer explains: It is impossible for judgments made by men – even if carried out with justice and fairness – to not contain some element of iniquity. This is because mortal beings do not have the ability to get to the very bottom of justice. Hence it is obviously impossible to perfectly assess the correct degree of punishment that a guilty person deserves. Furthermore the verse, "The judgments of the L-RD are true and righteous altogether" (Psalms 19:10) means that in judgments made by human beings, punishment is evaluated only in consideration to the guilty person himself, despite the fact that there are obvious repercussions from this punishment that affects his family and friends. A human judge has no way of accurately evaluating such effects.

However the judgments of the Holy One, blessed be He, take everything into account. Thus when a guilty person is deserving of punishment, yet this punishment would cause others to unfairly suffer or experience shame, the person is not punished. This is because the Holy One, blessed be He, judges a person together with those around him. Thus the verse states, "The judgments of the L-RD are true." Why are they true? It is because they are "righteous altogether."

When the Ramban went to visit a disciple of his who had fallen ill, he realized that his end was near, that he was going to die. The Ramban said to him: "Listen, my son, to what I command you to do. Know that in the world above there is an upper palace called the Throne of Justice, where the Shechinah stands. Here is an amulet that will help you open all the gates of Heaven until you reach the upper palace. Once there, you are to ask some important questions that I have concerning the Jewish people. When they are resolved, you must return to me and relate the answer you heard."

The Ramban's disciple eventually died, and one day he appeared to the Ramban and said to him: "May our teacher know that everywhere I went with your amulet, all the gates of Heaven were opened to me. However when I asked your questions, I was immediately shown that they do not exist in the World of Truth, where everything is righteous in judgment."

From all that we have said, we realize that everything that happens in the world occurs fairly and in a completely just way. Hence we must learn to accept Heaven's judgments with complete faith. Above all, we must not complain about what Hashem is doing, for He is righteous and fair.

GUARD YOUR TONGUE

Atoning for the Sin of Lashon Harah

When the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur, the first thing he did was to offer the incense. Now the Sages have said that the incense atoned for the sin of Lashon Harah (Yoma 44a), which teaches us just how serious this sin is. It is so serious, in fact, that before doing anything else the High Priest – the holiest man among the entire Jewish people – had to rectify it in the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year. This teaches us that rectifying the sin of Lashon Harah must always be done first, and that whoever wants to improve his conduct and return to G-d must start by improving his words.

A TRUE STORY

What Lies Beneath the Glass

It is written, "Yeshurun grew fat and kicked" (Deuteronomy 32:15).

There was a poor merchant who at one point began experiencing great success in everything he did, quickly becoming an extremely wealthy man. He started to think that he was succeeding in business because of his abilities and intelligence, and the more his wealth increased, the more his ego grew. He even began looking down on his friends and avoiding them. One day Rabbi Yechiel Michal of Zlotchov came to visit him. Rabbi Yechiel brought him near a window and asked him to look outside: "What do you see?" The wealthy merchant replied, "I see people walking along the street." Rabbi Yechiel then brought him near a mirror and asked him, "And now what do you see?" The merchant replied, "I see myself." In a tone of rebuke, the Rabbi said to him: "Both the window and the mirror are made of glass, but the mirror has a thin layer of silver beneath. Without the silver we see others, but with the silver we see only ourselves."

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi Avraham HaMalach

Rabbi Avraham Zatzal was a righteous and holy man, as well as the son of the Maggid of Mezritch, Rabbi Dov Ber. From his youth, Rabbi Avraham was known as being holy and pure, and he would deny himself to the point of exhaustion, to the point of being able to extricate himself from the bonds of materiality. Rabbi Avraham was just 20 years old when the Baal Shem Tov passed away in 5520, yet he was already known as HaMalach ("the angel"), for he truly conducted himself as such.

Rabbi Avraham's study partner was Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the founder of the Chabad dynasty. They entered into a pact with one another: Rabbi Shneur Zalman would teach him the revealed Torah, while Rabbi Avraham would teach him the concealed Torah. A powerful bond was established between the two, a bond that lasted until the death of Rabbi Avraham. He did not inherit the leadership of the chassidim from his father, the holy Maggid, but instead totally isolated himself and lived a life of self-affliction.

At one point his father appeared to him in a dream and asked him to change the way in which he served Hashem. Rabbi Avraham said to him, "What do I have to do with you, my father of flesh and blood? My soul yearns for my exalted Father!" His father replied, "My son, if I am not your father, then why did you accept your inheritance?" Rabbi Avraham replied, "I hereby renounce it!" At that point a fire broke out in his home, and all the objects that he had inherited from his father were burned. Included among these items was a gold covered tobacco box that Rabbi Avraham had received from his father before he died.

Rabbi Avraham moved to the town of Chavastov, but he did not live there long. In fact only six months later, at the age of just 37, Rabbi Avraham passed away and was buried in Chavastov. The date was Tishri 12, 5537. May his merit protect us all.